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# HELEN ERSKINE.

BY

MRS. M. HARRISON ROBINSON.



PHILADELPHIA:  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.  
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# HELEN ERSKINE.

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## CHAPTER I.

"NAY, mother, is there no discrimination in circumstances, such as difference of temperament, social claims, and rank of life? The person you hold up to my imitation is opposite to me in all these. From birth itself our paths have widely diverged. I am, by nature, buoyant, alive to enjoyment, delighting in society, of active rather than contemplative habits. As well try to turn back the stream in its onward course as reverse natural tastes and aptitudes, or create them anew. May we not enjoy life as it presents itself, and await mature years before we don the raiment of gravity, and check the gaiety that pertains to the season of youth?"

"Assuredly, Everard, there is discrimination; but your fancy traces the outlines too faintly, and with too narrow a scope. That you have rank and station entitles you to no merit, but greatly enhances your responsibility as an example to others less favored in this; natural temperament, unrestrained because natural, opens a flood-gate of countless errors, and social claims need guards lest we barter, for trifles, that inestimable talent, TIME, whose ravages nothing

can repair, and for whose just improvement we must render strict account. You will not, I think, dissent from my proposition, that a man who resolutely stems the tide of existing disadvantages, is unflinching in self-denial, unmoved by the lures or ridicule of the world around, sedulously improving whatever gifts he may possess, with a standard of honor and virtue not lower than the Gospel has established, such a man, I say, not only is entitled to, but commands and receives the esteem and respect of his fellows, and may be pronounced worthy the imitation of a prince, much less the Hon. Everard Faulkner of Knowlton."

"I do not deny that your picture, if not rather highly colored for Hugh Bolton, is a noble one, if attainable in practice; but, may not some of these exertions have their origin in a desire to reach certain advantages I already possess, such as a more elevated station, associations above his sphere, and the like? You do not reckon ambition among the virtues of your model, my dear mother. Had he inherited what he, doubtless, covets, would he have developed those traits that have obtained from you so warm a panegyric?"

"Speculation on such possibilities is vain and profitless; but I will only suppose that, with the just appreciation of life and its aims, developed in the consistent practice of the person we are considering, a more elevated position would rather have served to a wider range of virtuous illustration. The natural tendency of expanding intellect is upward, and it can no more be checked than a tree in its growth. Genius, if allowed due culture, will from the sapling become

the oak, shoot forth wide-spreading branches, and tower above the plantings of a more luxuriant soil and less hardy germ."

"Genius! ay, mother, but genius is a gift vouchsafed to few. It is a native endowment, whose impetus demands less effort for attainment than is necessary for less gifted mortals. *En passant*, while quite content to award Hugh Bolton his meed of praise, for he is, in truth, a fine fellow, I am not sure that he is such a *rara avis* as to claim a niche in that illustrious galaxy."

"Nor do I claim for him so lofty a height. He is yet but the sturdy sapling, and we know not what the branches of tender green may become under genial, ripening sun and shower. Whatever intellectual powers he may possess, meanwhile, should be reckoned as gifts, as they certainly come not by inheritance. And I incline to the opinion, that the perception he manifests of genius in others, by his bent of study and choice of authors, has too much of a kindred principle not to have ties of relationship which the family of that royal lineage will not wholly disdain. But, my dear Everard, it is not his intellectual gifts, nor his taste for literature, nor his ambition that I am commending: it is his steadfast purpose in the employment of time, his courage in the maintenance of religious observance amid countervailing obstacles, and the consequent virtue and purity of his daily life. Acknowledge that there is reflected in the calm face of this young man the peace of a good conscience, the simple dignity of one that rules himself after God's word, rather than the fickle statutes of man's creating."

"Difference of temperament, mother, and difference of taste—Hugh Bolton, I confess, is somewhat grave for me. At college, he was called the 'Parson,' and I am surprised that he did not go into the Church,—his mien, appearance, and mode of life seem so fitted for the vocation. He seldom sought companionship in our rollicking set; and if, by chance, thrown among us, was so evidently out of place as to be almost amusing. But, in truth, though we dubbed him Prig and Parson, and thought him righteous overmuch, yet the genuine respect he elicited always forbade the least approach to ridicule. And yet his calm face, as you call it, could be moved to anger, as I can testify. One day, fatigued by a long cricket-match, Egmont and I strolled off into a grove, at some distance from the play-ground, and in a sequestered spot, we discovered Bolton so deep in a book as to be unaware of our approach till at his side.

"'Ha, Bolton!' exclaimed my friend, 'what have you there so interesting as to preclude observation of two victorious knights of the cricket tournament? Prythee, man, rouse thyself and tell of thy study.'

"The student looked up, surprise mingling with a slight expression of annoyance on his countenance, at the intrusion on his rapt absorption, and replied by handing the book to his interlocutor.

"It was a small Italian Testament. Egmont is well versed in ancient languages, and a proficient especially in Greek, of which he is proud; affecting at the same time rather to despise modern tongues, as respects their literature, in comparison with the massive tomes of antiquity.

“‘Ah,’ said he, ‘*Nuovo Testamento!* I should have supposed one so conversant with the noble original in which this sacred book was written, could scarcely have been content with anything inferior to the stately language of Homer. This modern costume, into which the flowing toga of Cicero has been transformed, is, I think, better suited to the minstrel Inamorato, beneath his lady’s lattice, or the Cantatrice of the St. Carlo, than the solemn recital of the divine miracles.’

“‘This inspired volume,’ replied Bolton, his features kindling with feeling and enthusiasm, ‘must, of necessity, infuse its divine essence into whatsoever medium is employed for transmission to our understanding. An arbitrary judgment, after mere cursory, or, perchance, no examination of its beauties, you will have the candor to acknowledge, is not a fair test of force or adaptation. The mellifluous pathos of the Italian language is not unworthy the history of the life of Christ, from the cradle to the cross. Nor should I have expected to hear a belles-lettres scholar like Lord Egmont so condemn the tongue that has illustrated the genius of a Dante and a Tasso.’

“My friend pursued the argument partly from a desire to tease Bolton, whom he considered as inclined to exclusiveness in his mode of life, and not sufficiently impressed with his privilege of association with his superiors in rank.

“‘Dante and Tasso,’ he continued, ‘wrote in their native tongue, and the New Testament is rendered into the same for his countrymen, as for us in English, and it is meet and needful; but, in comparison with the Greek, it is like the pretty flowers that carpet our

meadows, aspiring to emulate the spreading elm with its countless leaves and hardy roots and trunk.' And then, suddenly opening the volume, he added, 'Listen, and be convinced,' and with bantering, if not sarcastic tone, he read the words from St. John, *Il buon Pastore mette la sua vita per le pecore*—'The good Shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep.'

"The next instant Bolton was on his feet, and with flushed face, and agitated voice, he exclaimed,—

"'Restore me the book, my lord! I cannot permit a truth so sacred, so endearing, so touching to us all, if duly susceptible of its momentous import, to be made the theme of light criticism or irreverent discussion.'

"And before Egmont had recovered from his astonishment at the unwonted animation he had provoked, Bolton, with his *Nuovo Testamento*, had, with rapid steps, gained considerable space toward his chambers.

"'What a confounded prig goes there!' said Egmont, as we threw ourselves on the grass; and our conversation quickly taking another turn, he soon forgot the brief interview; but my memory still retains the sudden transformation of the calm, contemplative student into the indignant defender of a cherished principle."

Here the discussion was abruptly terminated by a summons to the mother on domestic concerns, when the son, whistling to his dog, sallied forth into the park of the noble demesne to which he was lineal heir, perchance to muse upon the wise and gentle counsels of his only remaining parent, at least until some fresh enticement of pleasure or solicitation of a gay companion should supersede them in his memory.

## CHAPTER II.

THE majority of the Hon. Everard Faulkner had been attained; but a few weeks had past, since, amid brilliant fêtes and rejoicings of friends and tenantry, he had been publicly disenthralled from the restraints of guardians to which his father's death had consigned him; and now, sole master of a long-descended inheritance, there rests no cloud on his buoyant, joyous spirit, and the world, at his feet, invites acceptance of the thousand allurements her siren voice pronounces unfailing in their enchantment, and well befitting his youthful prime and rank in life. Endowed by nature with a mind of no ordinary calibre, to which every means of culture had been sedulously applied, with a temper naturally fine, and little subject to irritation in the atmosphere of love and ease wherein he had been nurtured, overflowing with generous feeling and good impulses, his lot in life was enviable indeed, promising a bright career of happiness, and an exemption from its ordinary ills. But what, save the Omniscient eye, shall penetrate the obscure vista of future years, discern the foe lurking among the outer defenses, seemingly, to mortal ken, secure and impervious, or perceive the stealthy instrument burrowing at the very base of the citadel, while the warden at the mailed portal wots not of danger? Amid the light that illumined his far-stretching path, the halo that encircled the pinnacle on which he vainly thought himself immovable,



there was emitted, from within him, an element that foreboded imminent destruction, as a spiral column of smoke from a palace-roof portends the downfall of its splendor. A phantom decked in the ephemera of innocent hilarity and ready mirth, indomitable in its power, was his constant shadow, watching occasion to break asunder every purpose of good, to dissipate every reproof of conscience for wasted hours, to whisper promise of coming pleasure, and substitute frivolous counsels for words of soberness and truth! *Levity* was his besetting sin, infirmity of purpose, subverting the best-formed resolves, putting to flight wholesome reflection or the proper use of time, crumbling well-arranged plans, like a house of cards, at a touch, and making repentance for failure or neglect short-lived and evanescent as the hues of a summer-cloud. With hosts of friends, as it ever is with favorites of fortune, his elegant person, social qualities, high rank, and unincumbered estate, awarded him the perilous distinction of unrivalled popularity and a horizon of future prosperity whose sun should never go down.

His father, obliged for many successive winters, by pulmonary weakness, to exchange the humid air of England for the balmy clime of foreign lands, chose rather to forego the companionship of his only son than deprive him of advantages he deemed both necessary and unparalleled, of inhaling with his native atmosphere the feelings, sentiments, and nationality of an Englishman, and the education of an English university. From this decision there was no appeal, though the fond mother, in the short intervals the

seasons allowed them to remain in their beautiful home, discerned with anxious alarm the germ of that fickleness in her darling which demanded the watchful, sleepless vigilance of parental effort; but called by duty and affection to accompany her frail and suffering husband to distant lands, she could only, with earnest entreaties to watch over and counsel, commend him to the guardianship appointed by his father, and with tearful prayers, pray God to have him in His holy keeping. At length the insidious disease that had been preying on his vitals by inches, finished its allotted work; and beside the sparkling waters of the blue Mediterranean, amid the glowing beauty of nature and careless gaiety of passing multitudes, the Hon. Philip Faulkner sank quietly to rest, leaving his son near the close of his minority, and scarcely more an orphan than his father's long decline of ten years had already rendered him.

This brief record will suffice to elucidate the colloquy with which our story opens, the mother endeavoring, by judicious eulogy, to demonstrate the nobleness and dignity of a self-reliant character, forming itself a standard of true greatness according to the moral grandeur of divine maxims, the unflinching pursuit of lofty aims, the real purpose of being, and the priceless value of time, in contrast with the pygmy status of man's creating, the giddy expenditure of fleeting hours and persistent devotion to pleasure which passes with the using, or, in vanishing, leaves the sting of unavailing remorse.

## CHAPTER III.

It was a wintry December day in the great metropolis of England, a cold, driving sleet, blinding to the eyes and perilous to pedestrians, when in D—— Street a young gentleman was dauntlessly pursuing his way, little heeding the pitiless storm that resisted his progress, his very tread betokening a firm resolution, not wont to yield to obstacle or discouragement. A well-knit frame, stature scarcely above medium height, features more intellectual in expression than regular in outline, large hazel eyes, filled, as it were, with the repose of a quiet spirit within, and more of manly dignity than ordinary at the age of twenty-four. The closely-buttoned coat developed a figure of symmetrical proportions, while the collar, left open with the fearless confidence of youthful vigor, presented a throat which might, perchance, have excited the jealousy of Childe Harold himself.

This, too, was the only son of a mother who was a widow, but his were not the gifts of high lineage, or broad domain, or aristocratic titles. He entered life, not amid stately avenues sheltered from heat and storm by centenary oaks and bordered by primrose and purple heart's-ease, but at the outset of an unhewn path, its growth, the wild tangle of the forest, whose uprooting must bear the burden and heat of the day.

His father was born in respectable middle-life, which could not aspire to be classed among English gentry,

and, placed early in a London banking-house, had, by his assiduity, spotless integrity, and aptitude in the routine of the institution, been elevated to a partnership in the prosperous and honorable firm but two or three years, when death suddenly cut short his career, leaving his widow sole guardian of his young son, then only nine years of age, with a moderate competency and an unsullied name, whose memory should raise no blush to the cheek, as their inheritance.

His mother, in worldly parlance, came of gentler blood, being the penniless daughter of a Scotch laird, and reared in the heart of the brown Highlands. In a chance encounter in Auld Reekie, whither he had gone as confidential emissary of the banking-house, and where Jessie Bournlee was diligently giving the last polish to a retired education, her artless beauty and shrinking modesty captivated the heart of the elder Bolton, already of mature years, though still a subordinate in office. Transferred from the invigorating gales of the free Highlands to the narrow limits of a small house in the murky atmosphere of crowded London, the blooming cheek of the Scottish blue-bell began to pale and her spirit to pine for the mountain breeze. To counteract this effect as far as practicable, Mr. Bolton removed to a cottage in the suburbs, with a garden and a portion of ground attached, and here the little Hugh first saw the light. After his elevation in the institution and corresponding increase of income, Mr. Bolton exchanged his modest habitation in the suburbs for a manor-house, more retired, but still, by modern facilities of locomotion, quite accessible to the city, of ampler dimensions, and, though

somewhat dilapidated by long absenteeism, with gardens and shrubberies, almost invisible amid the rank grass that had rioted unchecked in wild luxuriance for years; yet the beauty of the situation, the fine old trees, and capability of restoration, tempted him to embrace the opportunity of its being thrown upon the market by a needy spendthrift to become the purchaser at half its value. There, by diligent effort, ravages of time and neglect were repaired, scythe and pruning-knife made smooth the lawn and rendered the clustering vines and shrubberies their due proportions, so that soon the Manor, as it was called, became as remarkable for its beauty and preservation as it had been for its appearance of ruinous neglect. *L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose*. While, on his daily return from his duties, the eye of Mr. Bolton looked with such fulness of content at the rose again coloring the cheek of the wife he had translated from the Scottish Highlands, as it seemed, for a time, to wither in the close precincts of foggy London, and with internal gratulation viewed the beautiful retreat he had acquired at so little cost, and beheld in imagination a broad landscape of many years to come, replete with happy enjoyment underneath the lofty trees he had not planted, inhaling the perfume of flowering vines hands had trained, now crumbled into dust beneath old tombs in yonder church-yard whose sculptured insignia his unskilled eye could neither ken nor unravel, already was the bow bent and the arrow pointed by the unerring Archer, that was destined to break the golden bowl. London was his world, and, like Owen and the house of Osbaldistone, he con-

ceived no aspiration higher than the attainment of a voice in the administration of the institution in which he had spent his life. Naturally, therefore, ambition for his son centred in his accession to the post he had himself gained, after passing the flower of his days in the plodding routine of unvaried mechanical offices. But, whether or no this object would have been attained had he survived to rear the youthful scion, and, by dint of love and parental authority, bend the twig in that chosen path, must forever remain uncertain. A devout member of the Established Church, funeral rites according to its solemn ritual were administered at his decease; and it was during visits of condolence by the rector of their parish church that the influence had its first origin which constituted the tide of the young Hugh's fortunes. The boy's remarkable sobriety of mien, his filial piety, and sensible answers, excited the interest of the good clergyman, and he, one day in his absence at school, inquired minutely into his mother's purpose and prospects in respect to him. She communicated his father's design that he should follow his own vocation, and hereafter enrol his name in the banking company as his successor.

"Far be it from me, madam," said the rector, Mr. Boynton, "to interpose any obstacle to the wishes of his deceased father, to which he should award all due and reasonable homage, but to impose a profession on one so young seems at least more arbitrary than just. What appears to be the bent of his mind and inclination, as far as developed?"

"Study, sir, a passion for books, thirst for knowledge not easy for us to satisfy, for our library is but

scanty, save with records of banking; and such reading as the child could procure, he would go over and over again. He never tired, from earliest childhood, of listening to my old Scottish lore and Highland legends; and for a birthday gift or reward for an action that pleased his father, always chose historic tales of Scotland or England, and will now sit poring for hours over the Border Minstrelsy, the Cotter's Saturday Night, or such like."

"He is a pupil of the neighboring academy?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what are his studies there?"

A footstep behind her caused the mother to turn her head, and she replied,—

"Hugh is here, sir, to answer for himself."

After a greeting, returned by the boy with modest reverence, Mr. Boynton propounded the question to him.

The course denoted what is termed a substantial education for commercial life, especial attention, by his father's direction, being given to arithmetic and mathematics, to ground him in the knowledge necessary for his future calling as banker.

"And you like these useful studies, Hugh?"

The boy blushed, as if rather embarrassed at the question, but answered, with the candid simplicity natural to him,—

"No, sir, I do not."

The minister smiled at the decided tone of the reply, and then inquired what he preferred to them.

"Those the boys call the higher branches, sir,—the classics and histories of chivalry; but my father said

such studies were for gentlemen of rank who had nothing to think of but pleasure, and not for such as had a name and fortune to make in the world."

"What book is that you have now?"

"The Knights of the Round Table, sir, lent me by one of my companions. I hope you will not think it wrong for me, sir, I have so few books of my own and have read them all so often."

"Not precisely wrong, Hugh, but I believe my library will afford something more suitable for you, at present, and more instructive. If you will permit me to select, I can supply you with reading for a long time to come—what say you?"

The boy, in a transport of delight at such an offer, rushed forward to the good clergyman, his whole face lighted up with such rapturous emotion as to change its usual character of repose for one of brightness and animation, and in an impulse of gratitude threw his arms around Mr. Boynton, but the next moment, abashed at the freedom, withdrew in confusion.

The rector was deeply touched by the artless acknowledgment of the gift he had conferred, one which had cost him nothing; and a fervid sympathy sprung up in his heart for the friendless orphan, imbued with tastes whose gratification had been denied him, and which his own cultivated mind could so well appreciate; and he, from that instant, resolved to bring him under his critical eye and determine his course according to future development.

"The parsonage, you know, Hugh," he resumed, "is but half a mile distant, and I offer you free access to my library at all leisure hours. Suppose you make



a début there next Saturday morning, and remain the day among the books and in the grounds, eh?"

The mines of Golconda would have been as dross compared to the idea of the treasure a library at his disposal conveyed to the excited imagination of his listener; but, on the point of joyful assent to so brilliant a proposition, he remembered his widowed mother, and fondly approaching her, replied,—

"I thank you, sir, from my heart,—but my mother would be alone."

Mrs. Bolton, who had sat a pleased and interested auditor of the colloquy, interposed by saying,—

"No, darling, you know, my Cousin Anne is expected from Edinbro' to-morrow, and I shall have her for company, and too many things to talk of to miss you for the day. I will not let you refuse the minister's kindness."

Thus, with no shadow on his anticipations, it was arranged that, on the ensuing Saturday morning, he should repair to his enchanted palace; and the rector took leave, followed by the thanks of a grateful mother, and the blessings of the happiest boy on earth.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE Scotch cousin, a staid maiden of forty or thereabouts, duly arrived as consoler and companion to the widowed mistress of the Manor; and the long-wished-for Saturday having at last dawned, Hugh, seeing his mother intent on hospitable thought, and immersed in the exhaustless fund of past associations, with a clear conscience, and after an embrace long enough for a month's separation, bounded forward in the direction of the prospective paradise which had been his thought by day and dream of each night since the eve of Mr. Boynton's visit.

It was a beautiful May morning, and the fragrant thorn hedge on either side of his path, alive with the blackbird, the thrush, bullfinch, and countless other feathered songsters, making the perfumed air vocal with their inspiring music, served to enhance the pleasure that filled the soul of our young pedestrian.

Can there be found in any part of this fair universe which God has made for man's abode, a more perfect image of peace and refined seclusion than the rectories of England present to the eye?

A stone house of moderate dimensions, but substantial convenience, embowered in old trees, and almost covered with climbing vines of rose, honeysuckle, or that "sweet lingerer after summer-time," the white jasmine, with its starry flowers and dark-green leaves; or if it chance to rank among the more venerable

mansions of older date, with gables, a living mass of time-honored ivy, that defies the snows and rude blasts of winter to dim its gloss or sever its clinging embrace. Few of those homes of merry England could surpass, in calm repose and rural beauty, the rectory of Moreton which the young Hugh was now approaching; and though ordinarily a lover of nature according to his childish perception, at present, in her most charming array of field and flowers, it must be confessed he was rather preoccupied with anticipations of its internal attractions—his novel position, moreover exciting some trepidation as he entered the gate—than with the rich stores of bloom and sweetness around him.

An ample portico, with its garniture of clustering vines, introduced him to the hall-door, where, to his timid ring, a respectable serving-man appeared quickly, as if expecting him, and at once preceded him to the rector's presence. Mr. Boynton was seated at a table, writing, in the library, and with him was a younger gentleman, in clerical attire, standing within a bow-window gazing in rapt silence on the lovely prospect it opened to view.

The rector lifted his head as Hugh was ushered in, and rising, exclaimed,—

"Ah! my young friend, welcome to Moreton. I must commend your punctual observance of the promise made a few days since. It is a great virtue in my opinion. Stepney," he added, "addressing his companion, "this is the young student of whom I spoke last evening."

Mr. Stepney, who was the curate, advanced, pre-

senting a countenance expressive of intellectual power mingled with benevolence, and grave, dignified mien, well befitting his sacred vocation. He greeted the boy, now quite abashed at finding himself the object of attention from two such divines, and in a tone of gentle kindness, as if to encourage him, said,—

“It will cheer our solitude to have such a companion.”

After a few inquiries about his mother, his morning walk, and similar topics, Mr. Boynton bade him amuse himself with the books that filled the shelves of the spacious apartment, and resumed his pen, while the curate stepped out upon the lawn to enjoy, fully, the wealth of nature he had been admiring from within.

Thus was Hugh left to the unrestrained contemplation of treasures such as his imagination had never conceived; and at the close of a day of perfect happiness to himself, in which Mr. Boynton judiciously used opportunities of learning his tone and temper of mind and character, he returned to the Manor with books, selected by his interested host, and an engagement to return on each ensuing Saturday.

After several of these successive days, “marked with white in the boy’s calendar,” it chanced that, on one of them, the bishop of the diocese, being on a visitation, was a guest at the rectory, observed him, and inquired who the young visitor was. Mr. Boynton had scarcely concluded his recital in answer when the bishop said quickly,—

“By-the-way, that reminds me of a perplexing commission I received when on the point of leaving home. It is a letter from a cousin of mine on the subject of

her only son. She is about to set out for the Continent with her invalid husband, who is forced, by his state of health, to flee from our foggy isle to more sunny skies, and will not subject his son to the corrupting effeminacy, as he terms it, of a foreign education. His resolve that he shall have none other than a thorough English nurture, physically and mentally, is so fixed as to resist all his wife's remonstrances and entreaties to reverse it. In this emergency she appeals to me for aid. Listen to her words: 'Can you find for the child I am thus forced to abandon an asylum with a clergyman of culture and refinement, willing to assume the duties of his education and prepare him for the university? I shrink from the alternative of a public school, with its manifold dangers both to health and morals. I beseech you, my dear cousin, assist me in this perplexity, etc.' Now, can you counsel me in this dilemma by suggesting any one, either in or out of the diocese, fitted for and willing to undertake the charge?"

The rector, apparently lost in thought, did not immediately respond, but, after a moment's silence, propounded some questions as to the age, mind, and disposition of the bishop's young relative.

"I saw him," he replied, "a year ago, while on a tour in that part of the country; he was then about ten years old, seemed spirited and intelligent, remarkable for personal beauty, and full of mirth and sport."

"Such a charge, as your lordship is conscious, is not to be lightly assumed, and yet, it might enter fitly into a scheme I, with Mr. Stepney's acquiescence, have formed in regard to my protégé yonder. That

is to have him as inmate and train him for college. A fellow-student might not be amiss." . . . . .

"My dear Boynton," interrupted the bishop, "a right noble scheme, and an associate in study is generally an incitement to exertion. Only think, too, of this poor boy left practically an orphan, exposed to the countless temptations incident to his rank and fortune, at so early an age. With your daily supervision, and such as my own engrossing duties will permit me to add, together with the rare benefit of instruction from your accomplished curate, the highest aspirations of his parents will be more than fulfilled, and myself relieved of an onerous commission. - I love my cousin, and feel great sympathy for her in such a trying extremity."

"There is a consideration, however, which has, perhaps, escaped your lordship's notice, that may essentially affect such a plan. I mean the young gentleman's gifts of rank and fortune. My protégé is not a branch of a genealogical tree, and, though of respectable lineage, does not possess the aristocratic descent which the parents of the young heir might deem requisite in an intimate associate. I found this field-flower by the way-side, and it is my purpose, if it may be, to engraft him among a nobler stock than that of mere inherited wealth and title. By close observation, he develops to my eye an aptitude for study and an intellectual perception, of pure and hardy growth. For him, also, the contact might be deleterious, from the nature of inherent circumstances. May not my plan for his future be materially impaired by the introduction of this gorgeous conservatory-plant, infusing

new ideas of grandeur and luxury pertaining to another sphere of existence? His path in life, though trodden by genius in long array from age to age, still lies through the forest, and with his own hand must he remove its obstructions, neither fainting nor looking back as he marches."

"My dear Boynton, it belongs not to mortal vision to penetrate futurity. What qualities my young relative may possess I know not; but, surely, a skilful hand may easily prune and shape so tender a sapling. As regards your fears of association, in the minds of his parents, believe me, they are groundless. My cousin has too much good sense and Christian principle to indulge in such contracted fastidiousness. For myself, so far from deeming it objectionable, I consider it a fortuitous blessing in this case. It is well, sometimes, to transplant the exotic from the artificial heat of the hot-house to the bracing air and free sunlight, where the field-flowers flourish in such vigorous beauty."

After more reflection, Mr. Boynton yielded to the persuasive argument of his diocesan, unwilling to decline such an occasion of doing good to others, and somewhat incited by the hope of relative profit to Hugh, in obtaining a companion of his own age to share his sports and studies.

The rector had attained mature age, and was unmarried. His curate, Mr. Stepney, was a graduate of Oxford, with all the honors, and had just been endued with priestly orders. With refined literary taste and culture, and profound piety, he was an eloquent preacher, and preferred a temporary curacy and resi-

dence at Moreton to a sphere of independent and more conspicuous duty.

During the Saturday visits of the young Hugh he had scrutinized, with deep interest, the mind and heart of the thoughtful, friendless boy, and most willingly acceded to the rector's plan in regard to him, but not without some hesitancy to the bishop's proposition of the double charge.

Without much difficulty, Mrs. Bolton was prevailed upon to assent to this change of study and instructors, and, at least, to leave in abeyance, the prospective calling his father had indicated for him, to be determined according to future choice or fitness. Great was the delight of Hugh at the transfer from the Academy to Moreton Parsonage, from a weekly visit so tardy to his longing desire, to a daily sojourn in the library with its treasures, and a constant intercourse with his kind patrons, for whom he had conceived a reverence and a love bordering on idolatry.

In a short space, his associate in study and in their supervision was domiciled in that quiet retreat, which, to human eye, seemed impervious to danger, either of soul or body. This, the reader will have already surmised, is Everard Faulkner, the heir of Knowlton. To this haven had his fond mother accompanied him, to view, personally, the shelter in which he was to remain while her maternal love could no more exert its vigilance; and then, after commending her son with touching grace and earnest affection to his temporal guardians, she hastened to bid adieu to the shores of England, the leaves of autumn, now brown and sere, fast heralding the approach of the chilling blasts so



fraught with peril and suffering to the father and husband.

We shall not tarry to narrate the course of successive years in which the two young students enjoyed the high privilege of such watchful care and tuition, differing from each other in social pretensions and habits, with no great disparity of mind or heart, the extreme in which they were constitutionally wide apart as the poles, being stability in the one, instability in the other. The last, in the spoiled child of prosperity, with slight temptation to its exercise in his secluded retreat, and its growth checked by the gentle rein of delegated authority, had opportunities of expansion renewed in the intervals of yearly visits to Knowlton, at the return of his parents from their continental tour; while the opposite principle, elementary in the offspring of homely tastes and simple aspirations, struck its roots deep in the earth, and in requital of the sedulous culture bestowed, formed a hardy trunk and bold branches of fruit and leaves. He had not the dowry of an ancestral mirror in which to behold the reflection of a full-grown career in the smooth footprints of successive generations, but his pathway was through unknown regions, each step of which he must himself explore, amid vigil and fast, if need be, his lamp trimmed and burning. With devout attention, he listened to words of wise counsel on the excellence which is the meed of stable purpose alone.

More than once, at the pressing solicitation of Everard, he accompanied him to the stately mansion of his fathers, and it was there that Mrs. Faulkner observed the traits of perseverance in pursuit, and grave

inflexibility in what he deemed right, that so recommended him to her as a model to the rich and long-descended heir of Knowlton.

At college, these diverse characteristics of levity and firmness were more prominent, having a wider field for development than in the pure and flowery paths of Moreton rectory, and there they have their first respective fruits. Many a coveted prize eluded the flickering effort of the bright, intelligent Everard, and crowned with its bays the calm brow of the intellectual, persevering Hugh.

Equal in native endowments of mind, participants of a like instruction, while the latter made his gifts, both of nature and of cultivation, avail to certain ends by resolute application, not to be beguiled by beckoning pleasure in her parti-colored robes, the former, ambitious of distinction and full of good impulses; yet had not the iron will to resist, the self-denial to refuse, when a favorite chum would propose a brief relaxation, to indulge some project offering a fruitful harvest of enjoyment; and thus did the golden hours of opportunity roll rapidly past into that rapacious vortex whence none have ever returned.

## CHAPTER V.

FROM the long digression that has occupied the last chapter, since the introduction of the hardy young pedestrian in the streets of London, we return to the same place and time to follow Hugh Bolton, as he resolutely breasts the wintry sleet and tempest.

From his chambers in the Temple, of which he was a student, he was on his way, on financial affairs, to the banking-house in which his father had expended his youth and prime of life as a clerk, enjoying, for a short span, the proud attainment of a name and voice in its administration, and where, in thought, he had proposed for him a similar career. When not far distant from his destination, he observed, in front of one of the same institutions that abound in that part of London, an elderly gentleman, evidently of rank, of lofty, dignified mien, giving orders to an attendant, who immediately vanished in an opposite direction. He was then about to enter a carriage in waiting, when his foot slipped on the icy pavement, and but for the firm grasp Hugh extended in passing, would have fallen to the ground.

"I trust, sir, you are not hurt?" inquired he.

"Thanks to you, less seriously than if unaided. But," he added, his brow contracting as he again attempted to move, "I fear there is a sprain. Will you, young gentleman, further enhance my obligation by assisting me to my carriage? Unfortunately, I have

just dispatched my footman in another direction. It grieves me to inflict such an office on you; but——”

He could scarce repress a scream of pain as Hugh endeavored to perform this service, now, opportunely, aided by a passer who noticed the dilemma, and together they at length succeeded in the undertaking. Reluctant to leave the sufferer alone, Hugh offered his further attendance till he should reach home; which being gratefully accepted, orders were given the coachman to drive with speed, and for the space of an hour they rolled rapidly on, during which the gentleman's agony was too great for conversation, while Hugh, unable to relieve it, could only express his sympathy, and count the minutes till they should arrive. Finally, the carriage drew up before a large house, whose door seemed to fly open as if in expectation of its master, and the porter, with Hugh's ready help, slowly assisted him into the spacious hall. The bustle this necessarily caused, mingled with his groans, impossible to suppress, evidently aroused the attention of the inmates of a drawing-room near, for there was a rush into the hall, and exclamations of alarm on beholding the gentleman in such a plight. The group consisted of both sexes, and Hugh, deeming his presence no longer requisite, quietly withdrew; but hearing a musical voice cry, "*Oh, Zio caro!*"\* he turned his head at the sound of a language he loved and so rarely heard, only to have a glimpse of dark eyes, and a white arm, that seemed to flash light into the dim hall, and then passed outward into the street, now by

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\* Dear uncle.

contrast more wintry and gloomy than ever. In the exercise of his kindly offices he had felt no curiosity as to his companion's name and rank ; while in the mind of the latter, pain had precluded all inquiry in respect to the name or station of the individual to whom an accident had rendered him so indebted. The sufferer was at length placed upon a sofa, soothing applications hurriedly prepared, and the family physician summoned, who pronounced the ankle severely sprained in an effort to avert a fall, prescribed remedies, perfect rest and quiet, and retired, leaving his patient in the midst of a loving circle, each emulous of the post of nurse. His first words, after a slight alleviation of pain, were a hasty inquiry, looking round the room,—

“Where is the young gentleman?”

No one had seen him. The shock and distress at the sight of their relative in such a state had blinded their eyes to all else, and Hugh had disappeared, unnoticed save by the porter, his name unknown to all.

“Now this is worse than the pain itself,” he exclaimed, “scant courtesy, in truth, to one who, perhaps, saved me from a fractured limb and bestowed on me his personal attendance during a long and dreary ride,—and not to learn even his name!”

“Pray, sir,” asked a male voice in the company, “indulge us with some outlines of this stranger who thus vanished like a ghost, and to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude. Did he seem of our set?”

“Doubtless, as far as my agency would allow me to judge—manners, voice, deportment, all unexception-

able. It is truly annoying to be wholly without clue to his name and rank !”

“ Unless your perceptions on that score, usually so acute, were impaired by the circumstances of the case,” said another male voice, “ we shall speedily discover this lost clue, and unravel the mystery, my dear father, by encountering the young stranger in London in our own coteries.”

“ Nay, *Zio caro*,” was the next voice, the same whose rich melody had caught Hugh’s ear as he retreated, “ all in good time we shall find this same *preux chevalier* and remove his visor. And I will myself weave him a scarf, in guerdon of his service, and he shall, if it be his pleasure, wear my colors, and be my knight. But, now, let us banish all thoughts of young gentry,” glancing maliciously at the two beaux near by, “ at best but an idle fraternity, whose delight is to entangle silken skeins or quote old snatches of song or drama. You remember the prescription is rest and quiet. Shall I sing you *Buona Notte*, that you love so well, as invitation to gentle sleep ? First, though, dismissing these accomplished members of that aforesaid fraternity, quite superfluous beside a sick couch which pertains to woman’s province.”

He assented, by a gesture, to the proposed lullaby, which the exhaustion expressed on his face indicated as most apropos. The two cavaliers, however, were inclined to demur to this sentence of exclusion ; but, with a wave of her hand and a mock air of majesty, she forbade all appeal,—accordingly, with eyes and hands uplifted, as if protesting against her cruelty, they unwillingly retreated to the next apartment, taking

care, meanwhile, to leave the door ajar as they passed. There now remained beside the couch only this imperious beauty and a fair blonde of scarce seventeen summers, and soon there rose upon the silence,

"Buona notte, carissima mia,  
Riposi bene, Ciel la benedica,"

in exquisite strains, suitably modulated to the circumstances; and ere the sweet melody had died upon the ear its suffering occupant had entered the fairy-land of dreams, for a brief respite from the reality of intense pain.

We will now give a sketch of the hitherto nameless personages in whom we trust to have excited the reader's interest.

The elderly gentleman is the Earl of Merindale, the two younger, Geoffrey, Lord Egmont, his son and heir, and the Hon. Everard Faulkner of Kuowilton.

The fair portion of the company were his niece, Miss Lucia Courtney, and his daughter, Lady Isabel.

In Lord Merindale, a large hereditary fortune was illustrated by solid worth, cultivated intelligence, personal dignity, rendered more imposing by a stately height, and partially tinged with the hauteur a consciousness of rank often engenders. Preferring a retired to a public life, he resided almost wholly at his Castle of Merindale, in Kent, a beneficent landlord to his numerous tenantry, loved and revered by his household and immediate family, to whom he was a fond, indulgent father.

His only son is the Lord Egmont we met at college, differing little from other young noblemen of

his age, of fastidious social habits, proud of his station, with good personal appearance, and fond of pleasure, in which he considered his exemption from sordid cares, and the prudence pertaining to a less elevated sphere, fairly entitled him to indulge, heeding little the responsibilities such influence involves, or the account to be rendered of abused privileges.

Miss Lucia Courtney was the daughter of a younger brother, who married a fair Venetian while travelling in Italy, both of whom dying ere she had attained maturity, left their orphan child endowed with a small fortune, in bequest to her uncle, who at once adopted her as his own into his heart and home. She came from Venice to England at the age of fourteen, a type of rare Italian beauty: dark eyes, hair of the hue painters love to represent in their pictures of the Virgin, a complexion mingling her English and Italian origin, and medium height. The utmost pains had been lavished upon her musical talent, and her voice was rich and melodious. She had, moreover, enjoyed the double benefit of an English, superadded to her education under the best Venetian masters. The beautiful orphan, possessing such varied attractions, quickly won her way to all hearts, became a spoiled darling with her uncle, who called her his "*Italia*," while she in turn addressed him as *Zio caro*. Her young Cousin Isabel, her junior by two years, looked upon the dazzling Lucia as almost an angel, and, in her budding loveliness, was too innocent and affectionate to dream of jealousy or rivalry.

There was in the fair Venetian a vein of romance, almost inseparable from her birth in the City of the



Sea, itself a living romance, and an impassioned nature indigenous to that sunny region. Commensurate with her fervid enjoyment of whatever gratified her tastes and affections, was the intensity of her disappointment or sorrow. This was exemplified in her wild grief at the death of her mother, who survived her father five years, a grief so passionate, for months after her arrival in England, as to withstand all Lord Merindale's tenderness, and by its excess, astonished the children of the frigid northern clime.

Lady Isabel was in the dawn of early womanhood, a perfect English blonde, violet eyes, red and white, fresh as morning dew, light silken tresses, figure not fully developed, but fragile and symmetrical in promise, with English reserve and modesty not yet exposed to the world's discipline, which veiled a noble intellect and loving heart that had known no sorrow greater than the loss of a bird, no chagrin that did not admit of an antidote.

Deprived by death of her mother in early infancy, she remembered not the fair and fragile lady that faded meekly from earth like a wreath of morning mist; and when old enough to be guided to the gallery where hung the portrait of that angel-mother, there seemed to enter her childish mind a perception of the loss she had sustained, and long and lovingly would she gaze upon the image whose eyes followed her every motion. The resemblance, as the young Isabel ripened into womanhood, was too striking to pass unobserved; but she ever disclaimed such a compliment, while the eloquent blood on her modest cheek would deepen with gratification at the thought. She repaid

with the affection of a daughter the devotion of Mrs. Wardour, the admirable governess, to whose care Lord Merindale had entrusted her, who, in turn, watched over, with unspeakable interest, the bud rapidly unfolding into the flower, soon to be transplanted from the retirement of Merindale Castle into the festive pageantry of London, and, perchance, wither in its artificial heat and dazzling blandishments. Though not yet presented at court, the door of entrance into the fashionable world, she accompanied the family in their visits to the capital, and, during the present season, had witnessed from behind the scenes the brilliant début of her Italian cousin with lively interest. In a few days they were to return to the castle, where a number of invited guests would assemble to celebrate the Christmas holidays.

The last, though by no means the least important of the party, was the Hon. Everard Faulkner. He, too, had left Knowlton to share in the gaieties of London, was a welcome and frequent visitor in Leicester Square, and the intimate associate of his college chum, Lord Egmont.

**From Miss Lucia Courtney to Signorina Carlotta Maroncelli.**

“MERINDALE CASTLE, JAN. 8.

“My last letter, *cara mia*, was from the capital, and no doubt its almost illegible characters and frivolous style bore ample impress of the usual routine of a transit through a London winter. But what would you have from a poor maiden, amid the bewildering succession of ball, masque, opera, and ballet, in her first season, and not yet inured to its glittering maze?

Quietude and repose unknown, a few hours snatched from morning dawn for fitful slumber, perchance to waken for a *dejeûner* at Richmond, or canter in the Park, and thus in the whirlpool of lace, flowers, and plumes, the glare of lights and din of flattering tongues, how shall the scattered thoughts obey a summons to indite a rational epistle?

“Vainly would your imagination, my Carlotta, endeavor to reflect a life, contrasting so entirely with the solemn repose of our beautiful Venice, rising from the sea in mysterious silence, unbroken save by the measured dip of the gondolier’s oar to the murmured *canzonetta* from Tasso,—and in place of the thronging crowds that sway the streets of this great northern metropolis, a solitary Capuchin or gray Franciscan, with noiseless step, gliding along the narrow footpath, or round the corner of some old palace,—for the flaunting modern equipage and its prancing steeds, the ancient gondola, scarce ruffling the Adriatic in its still, slow march, like a dream of the past, or a mute at the funeral of Venetian glory.

“From London to Merindale, the transition to comparative quiet is refreshing to the weary mind and frame. And yet I do not deny that the season had its charms for me. At nineteen, the heart is not shut to the allurement of *Madam Pleasure*, with her siren song and robes of divers colors. Moreover, in Leicester Square, there were others beside her votaries, and I sometimes had a glimpse of reason and instruction which, I must honestly confess, in that aforesaid whirlpool, was rare and transient. Our last week in London was, perforce, quiet enough, because of an

untoward accident that befell my uncle, disabling him from walking, and causing such pain that, from inclination as well as duty, I remained at home to share the office of nurse with Isabel, deputing Egmont and his friend Faulkner to present apologies and report to me the stereotyped bombast 'of regret for a vanished star from the hemisphere of fashion,' etc. Meanwhile, I must not omit to tell you of the ray of romance that entered into the reality of that unfortunate sprain. A young gentleman—(now I can see as in a mirror your interest excited)—a young gentleman, near him at the instant, interposed his stalwart arm, and saved him from a fall whose consequences might have been serious, accompanied him home, assisted him into the very hall itself, and then disappeared like a vision of the night, unseen by us, fully absorbed by the shock of beholding our beloved one in such a state, his name unknown to all, to my uncle's great annoyance, at such seeming neglect in failing to acknowledge his obligation. But I am confident my instinct will discover him, albeit, without an inkling to guide me; and Isabel and I have already indulged sundry imaginings in regard to this phantom knight, our sculptured model being of course an Apollo in faultless symmetry and feature, chivalrous in port, voice of deep melody, and every virtue under the sun. Whether fate will ever permit us to identify said dreams is at best but doubtful.

"We returned to the castle for the Christmas holidays, and, with a goodly company of guests, passed the time merrily till Twelfth Night among mistletoe

boughs and yule-logs and rustic serenades from the peasantry that came for their dole. Isabel, as lady of the castle, and I, as next of kin, danced down a reel in the hall with a bumpkin apiece, to my excessive fatigue. But it is a usage of olden times, therefore I wound up my Italian languor to its needed pitch, and maintained the semblance of happy exhilaration with as little hypocrisy as the intense ennui within allowed. My young cousin is growing daily more lovely, and by next season, when she is to be presented, the bud will be unfolded into the beauteous rose, the fairest, I predict, of the London parterre. And I opine there is more than one cavalier that has eyes as well as myself; but she is timid as a fawn, and rarely affords opportunity for avowed admiration. It will require the crucible of a London winter to fit her for such homage. We shall again, ere long, exchange the far-stretching park and broad domain of the castle for the narrower precincts of Merindale House, with its foggy atmosphere and fashionable coteries, till Easter, when spring will be donning her robe of green and calling us to celebrate the Queen of Feasts amid the tender leaves and budding flowerets with which she is decking all nature. I shall hail it with delight, for, in truth, I am weary of a life of fashion, its conventionalities and hollow fascinations, and feel regret at the prospect of being again plunged into the heartless throng. But I must needs pause, Egmont summons me to join a skating-party to the pond near the lodge. *Entre nous*, the thought, to my southern blood, does not excite any special hilarity, but I cannot decline to accompany our guests. Fancy me, *mia cugina*, clad, cap-a-pie,

in fur, like an Iceland princess, and pity your shivering but still

"Fond

"LUCIA."

Hon. Ev. Faulkner to Sir Ashleigh Harcourt.

•  
KNOWLTON, March 1.

"You see, from the date, I am once more at home, after an absence of several months, divided between London, Merindale Castle, and other excursions of lesser magnitude. It was not without self-reproach that I met my mother's grave, though loving face, after the violation of my voluntary pledge to return to celebrate Christmas at Knowlton, among my tenantry, and in the observance of time-honored customs and traditions always deemed inviolate, and not reckoned complete without the presence of the lineal representative of many generations of Faulknors. But I am now fully resolved against another such prolonged absence from the best of mothers and the duties my domain and its accessories demand at my hands.

"Versatility of purpose, which my good tutor, Mr. Stepney, used to number among the faults of my boyhood, and our stern old professor at Oriel as one of the follies of my non-age, must not be suffered, unchecked, to sully my manhood. I am inflexibly determined to overcome this tendency to irresolution at once, and initiate the reform by obedience to my mother's wise counsel, to live more at Knowlton than heretofore, and occupy myself with the interests and well-being of those for whose care a large estate has made me responsible.

"As to the late dereliction, the Christmas I should have spent here was passed at Merindale Castle. Egmont's solicitations I could have withstood, but there was irresistible allurements in the dark eyes of the brilliant Lucia, and still more in the dawning loveliness of the young Isabel, who, meanwhile, still wraps herself in her virgin modesty as a valley-lily in its green leaf. But this reserve will doubtless thaw before the public gaze, to which her *début*, next winter, will necessarily expose her. Egmont seems quite *épris* of his beautiful cousin, regardless of her betrothal to some Italian Conte from childhood, while the fair Venetian receives his devoirs, as well as those of her whole train of admirers, with the mien of a princess permitting the due homage of her liegemen. She sings divinely, nothing can surpass the rich sweetness of her voice in her own mellifluous accents, which she says constitute the natural language of music. None can deny the flowing harmony of the Italian, and for music, fashion and taste have elevated it above all others; but in force of expression and true sentiment I prefer our old Saxon.

"This recalls your query concerning Bolton, our *ci-devant* college-mate. I know little of him since he left those classic halls. After a few months on the continent as *compagnon de voyage* to Mr. Stepney, who was ordered on a tour by his physicians, he repaired to London, and became a student of the Temple; and we may imagine him threading the musty folios and dry codes of jurisprudence with as much zeal and zest as we would the intricacies of a flowery labyrinth. You know his characteristic perseverance in aim, and

invulnerability to all seduction of divergence therefrom, and you remember that he, more than once, won the laurel from me by the exercise of this very quality, with which I am not endowed by nature, and, therefore, suffer the double temptation of prospective pleasure and temperament. Bolton, however, always bore his honors with such quiet modesty that, after the first mortification of defeat, I yielded with the best grace I could command, not a little mollified by the recollection that my name and station had been wrought out and established by a long line of ancestry, and could not be affected by the gain or loss of a university prize, while my opponent required the aid of the talent and indomitable energy he assuredly possesses, to lay the foundation of whatever rank or fame his genius may carve for him. In pursuance of my plan of reform, and as becomes my representative position in the county, I, to-day, accompany my mother on a visit to some of the neighboring gentry, preparatory, no doubt, to sundry humdrum dinners among dowagers and spinsters and landed proprietors, enlivened by discussions on the hackneyed topics of the day,—the corn-laws, French treaty, my lady's poodle, or merits of Bulwer's last novel. Award me thy sympathy, oh friend, and relieve the monotony with one of thy lively epistles to the staid and much enduring .

“FAULKNER.”



## CHAPTER VI.

"MY dear Everard, have you never thought of going into Parliament? The borough so long represented by a Faulkner, and which your father was forced by ill health to resign, is at present vacant, and most likely you will be solicited to stand for it. There seems a fitting opportunity for your entering on a career that may promote public utility and develop your capabilities of mind and action."

"The idea is, I confess, mother, not an attractive one to me. The tricks of subserviency and condescension, essential to the trade of electioneering, I am not conversant with, and to attain the needful formulary of slang and familiarity, in soliciting votes from a class to which I should otherwise exhibit a proper reserve, demands an apprenticeship, to reach proficiency. And then, there is the close, fatiguing attendance in London, bored by long harangues, and deafened by cries of 'question! question!' Verily, the picture is not inviting."

"Everard, have you never reflected that life, and the manifold advantages you inherit with it, are not bestowed for a fleeting series of pleasures and for self-gratulation? Has the word *responsibility* (and the language contains none more momentous) no record in your creed of time and its passing hours? No man liveth to himself, and there is, as well, the responsibil-

ity for opportunities and duties neglected as for voluntary errors."

"True, mother, but as regards the subject in question, if the borough from my father's hands passed successively into those competent to guard its interests, why should I seek to supplant such by assuming what would to me prove an onerous task?"

"The borough being now vacant, that argument is without force; your opponent is an untried personage, and the field one of legitimate aspiration. The sphere in which you chanced to be born precludes, by stringent usage, all idea of a profession except the church, military service, or parliamentary representation. For the first two you seem to have no vocation, and the latter alone remains, as a choice between a useful devotion of the various gifts you possess, of fortune, influential station, time and talents; and an existence, whose sole object will be to indulge self, whether in pursuit of frivolous pleasure, or a fastidious evasion of any object which demands effort and sacrifice."

"Will you pardon me, my dear mother, for the supposition that your views of life and its obligations are the natural fruit of your maturity, while the recreations, or pleasures, if you prefer the term, in my pathway, derive their zest from my spring-time? Is life altogether a duty?"

"Yes,—but what is duty? an embodiment of stern maxims, repelling the avenues of joy and happiness that open to our view? Oh, no. It is the elevated principle whose interpreter is conscience. Its paths may, oftentimes, be strait and narrow, but they lead infallibly to bowers of celestial peace. Its ways are

strewn with flowers to be gathered, and these are the innocent pleasures pertaining specially to the spring-time of life, but which do not compose its aim. That may be illustrated by a noble tree, bearing fruit, ever-ripening under the light of unwearied labor and wise appreciation."

"How many of the number that constitute representatives of the nation, mother, are influenced by so lofty a motive as conscientious duty, in adopting such a career? Is not ambition or emolument rather the controlling incitement?"

"In many cases it may be so, but we may hope not in all—nor does it, in any wise, invalidate the argument of duty in others. Law and order are essential to the life of a nation, and must be decreed by representative assemblies. There can be no higher or more responsible office than that of a lawgiver, and to its just fulfilment, the most exalted attributes are to be coveted. As regards the process of canvassing, I am far from recommending aught derogatory either to dignity or sincerity; but, surely, what good and true men have not disdained cannot be so reckoned. And in suggesting the idea to you, Everard, I am influenced by a desire for your happiness, in pointing out a mode whereby your life may have a purpose, and you may avoid the retrospect of wasted hours, destitute of solid benefit either to yourself or others."

## CHAPTER VII.

A SELECT party had assembled at Knowlton for the Easter holidays. The rain-storm without forbade all egress, and through the spacious rooms were seen dispersed small groups, seeking whatever of entertainment might be procured from the choice engravings, countless specimens of vertu, musical instruments, or conversation occasionally broken by a merry laugh, or, perchance, an ill-suppressed yawn from a solitary occupant of a lounge, endeavoring to while away the hour with a chance volume.

The same *partie carrée* of the inner drawing-room of Merindale House was there, with others, like themselves, in the first flush of life, two daughters of the Bishop of A——, whom we encountered at Moreton rectory, Sir Ashleigh Harcourt, and Mr. Stanmore, of the House of Commons. These were, for the moment, occupied in defining the antique panoply and elaborate insignia of a Crusader, represented to the life in an illuminated vellum of a past century.

"What thinks the fair Lucia of this living, breathing romance of the middle ages, ycleped the 'Order of Chivalry,' with its distinctive language, laws, usages, and costumes?" asked Egmont, observing a shade of pensiveness in her eye as it scanned the escutcheoned knight before her.

"It seems to me," she replied, "so marvellous as to render the present narrow, barren code lifeless and

cold in contrast. Chivalry, that once ruled society with its iron wand, was a real, enacted, personified drama; and yet, without the certification of history, we could scarcely believe that beings of our race, nay, of our own lineage, actually lived in a rainbow, or talked in such stilted terms, any more than in the reality of the Arabian Nights with their Genii, their Aladdins and their wondrous lamps."

"I imagined a sentiment more imbued with the romance of the subject, from the pensive intentness wherewith you regarded the embodiment of the order before you," he rejoined.

"It revived a memory of my childhood," said she, "when tales of chivalry were my delight, and Sir Amadis of Gaul my chosen hero. In my silent home upon the Adriatic, I was wont oftentimes to wander, with an ancient servitor of my mother's, to St. Marco, and contemplate, with childish wonder and admiration, the effigies of the grim old warriors that frowned down upon me from their pedestals, or lay recumbent on the mouldering tombs along the hollow aisles of the antiquated edifice."

"Scarcely, I think," said Everard, "is the truth, that such a state of existence, so inflated and bombastic, really signalized an era of the world, more strange than the fact of its rupture and actual abolition by the poignant ridicule of a single pen in the Don Quixote of Cervantes. Himself a living personage in the same age, by a simple work of fiction, he dared to oppose, with no other weapon than raillery, the spirit that governed it, and with a blow demolished the fabric, with all its ramifications of knights,

troubadours, tourneys, romantic pilgrimages, and bold adventures, as if it had been only a house of glass."

"It was no more than a house of glass," said Mr. Stanmore; "and so artificially soldered, as only to need a stiletto in a skilful hand to reduce it to fragments."

"And yet," rejoined Lucia, in bantering tone, "I know not if we, of the gentler sex, are not the losers by its extirpation. There must have been a certain charm in constituting the object of adoration to a renowned knight, who coveted, above all else, his lady's smile for the most daring feats, and in the lists of the tournament, rendered homage before the world by his election of her as queen of love and beauty, depositing himself, with his trophied spoils, at her royal feet. What says the Lady Isabel to such a picture? Would she not as proudly have crowned her victorious champion as did the fair Rowena the brows of the Disinherited Knight in the lists of Ashby?"

"Nay, my cousin," she replied, "I can in nowise imagine myself the conspicuous object of such a pageant, more resembling fairy lore than real life. But, in my inexperience, it seems to me, the spell of true love, and its allotted mysteries of silent devotion, would be broken by such proclamation of its fervor and sacrifice."

"Perhaps the Lady Isabel may have the stock of Cedric the Saxon engrafted on her genealogical tree," said Miss Umberton. "You remember his opinion of the tournament? 'I love not these vanities which were unknown to our fathers when England was free.'"

"Would that I had a like opportunity with the Pryor of winning a butt of Chian wine," added Sir Ashleigh Harcourt, bowing low to the blushing Isabel, who was indeed no inapt personification of the ideal Saxon princess of the line of Alfred.

"If the creed, then, be so summarily noted heretical in this matter-of-fact age," said Lucia, quickly, to relieve her modest young cousin, "we may at least gather up some fragments of its ritual. An unknown paladin, last winter, succored my uncle in time of need, and in guerdon of a service more precious to me than the shivering of a lance *pour mes beaux yeux*, I am now broidering a scarf, not of love, but of gratitude, for this shadowy individual, and most indefatigably have I pored over Froissart's musty chronicles in search of appropriate emblems *de l'escusson armorie*, for its ornamentation."

"And, if this same gallant paladin long remain *incognito*, unconscious of the meed awaiting him, may not a poor pretender, with no claim save that of covetous desire, be the happy recipient of a gift more precious than rubies?" inquired Egmont, jest in his voice, but earnestness in his eyes.

"Fie upon thee, Cousin of Egmont, for such insinuation of faithlessness to my chosen knight! Wouldst thou tempt me to forego my sworn purpose of devoting thought and my nimble fingers to this token of grateful memory? But my uncle says the *incognito* is of our set, and doubtless, during the next season in the gay metropolis, Isabel and I will divine him among a thousand."

"I trust Miss Courtney will not lavish all her favors

on shadows, while so many substantial aspirants pine for permission to merit a share of them," said the courtly Sir Ashleigh.

Before she could reply, a large, highly-colored engraving was held up to her view by Everard Faulkner.

"Ah, *la mia bella Venezia!*" she exclaimed, a tear welling to her eyelid and quickly brushed away. "How perfect," she continued, "and scarcely more mute and noiseless than is the living reality! Surely, that is the very gondola in which I so often glided over the waters of the Adriatic."

A feeling of sympathy pervaded the little circle at the emotion of the young Italian at the sight of her home, which caused a silence of a few minutes, broken at length by Everard.

"No city of Italy," said he, "not even Rome with her classic associations of ancient and modern fame, nor Florence with her *chefs-d'œuvre*, nor Naples with her Vesuvius, her blue bay, and buried cities, nor Pisa with her leaning tower, has half the charm for me as that strange mass of old palaces, rising out of the sea, sitting in lone, still majesty, the home to which silence has fled from the din and uproar of earth. Impervious to all innovation, Venice must ever remain a leaf from the romance of past times, safe from inroads of modern materialism."

"Perhaps, were individual histories collected from her daily annals, the leaf might become a volume," said Mr. Stanmore. "I remember one, in which I, the least romantic of men, was an involuntary actor, there, two years since, while attaché to the English Embassy



at Rome. With a young countryman of mine, I had gone thence on a tour in that part of Italy, and arriving at Venice, we went forth to explore its mysteries, and as the first object of interest, landed from a gondola at the foot of St. Mark's. My young friend, who was well versed in literary lore, ancient and modern, applied his utmost research to the investigation of the curious old structure, from the winged lion to the smallest device in image of the army of saints that peopled the chapels, when, in one of these, we were struck by the vision of a female figure kneeling before a lighted altar of the Virgin, whose whole appearance, costume, beautiful features, sad and almost wild in their expression, fixed our interested gaze, as, rising from her knees, she glided past us and vanished in the obscurity. Her person was nearly enveloped in a mantle of black cloth, and was tall and graceful, while the hood thrown partially back in devotion, revealed a face not less singular in its loveliness than in the deep melancholy impressed upon it. In leaving St. Mark's, we paused a moment before the Piombi, bestowing a sympathizing remembrance on Silvio Pellico and his imprisonment under the leaden roof, and then turned away to pursue our pilgrimage toward the Bridge of Sighs, when our attention was arrested by the appearance of an excited crowd beside the canal along which we were proceeding.

“‘Hark!’ said my companion, ‘there is a cry for aid,’ and, like an arrow, darted to the spot. When I, less alert, reached it, I perceived him in the canal, in the act of rescuing a drowning woman, and in the next moment he stood on the path, with her in his arms,

her long black garments trailing to the ground. Addressing a few hasty words in their own language, in which he was a proficient, to the applauding circle around, immediately the crowd opened and he passed outward, preceded by a guide, and entered a habitation near by, still bearing the unconscious creature he had saved from a watery grave. I followed my friend, eager to learn the issue of the adventure, my curiosity and interest the more excited from the suspicion a glimpse had created in my mind, that the unfortunate was none other than the beautiful devotee of St. Mark's chapel. I found her laid on a bed, and in a short time, remedies being administered, she opened her eyes and looked in bewildered silence at the group of spectators gathered about her, till her gaze rested intently on Bolton, engaged in chafing her icy hands and directing stimulants to be given, his countenance expressing the deepest pity and anxiety for her restoration. A physician arriving, my friend propounded to him, in Italian, questions as to her condition and the probable result. His reply was, 'a few hours at most,' as Bolton informed me, and, after leaving orders for the needful appliances, he departed. Despite my remonstrances at his remaining in wet garments, my friend persisted in his watch, and I would not desert him in a strange city.

"He addressed a few words to his charge, in Italian, and she replied in feeble accents. Instantly, with a leaf from his tablets, he wrote a name and direction, with a line in addition, and said to me in English: 'She desires the presence of the person here mentioned. The danger is so imminent that I fear to rely

on those around us. Will you endeavor to gratify her wish?—it may be important. I will await you here.'

"I could but assent; and, selecting one of the crowd as a guide and sort of interpreter, set out on my hasty mission. The address was a villa on the Brenta, and quickly procuring a gondola, we were soon skimming the waves of the Adriatic to our destination. I will not further prolong my narrative by a description of the matchless beauty presented by the view of Venice and her islets, the old palaces mirrored in the calm waters, the verdant shores of the Brenta, the towering heights of the Friuli mountains, and the countless gondolas that dotted the sea, all more resembling enchantment than actual life; but, briefly, after passing many porticoes and colonnades of the Venetian nobles, we disembarked at our destined haven. My sensations, I confess, recalled the reply of the Doge of Genoa, who, when asked by a courtier of Louis XIV., 'what most astonished him among the marvels of Versailles?' said, 'To find myself here.'

"The mission, you will agree, was novel enough. A stranger, ignorant of the language, not knowing the reception the request of which I was bearer might obtain, myself unable to elucidate the singular scene I had witnessed, altogether the sensations, as I ascended the long flight of steps from the water, were rather those of a dream than waking existence. This absorption of feeling could scarce give place to pleasure at the rich fragrance of the orange groves and the brilliant nature on every side, well-nigh overpowering to the senses. Entering the spacious marble hall, we

were met by a venerable domestic, who displayed toward us all the ceremonious form of Venetian society in the time of their Doges. Presenting my sole credential, we were at once ushered into a saloon of great extent, which a hasty glance showed me hung with faded tapestry and frescoed from the old Italian poets. The servant, after motioning us to be seated, advanced to the farthest end of the saloon, and presented the paper to a young gentleman, almost buried in an antique arm-chair, reading. Near him was a lute, and on a seat at a little distance was a guitar and book of poems held open with a flower. The gentleman rose instantly, in great agitation, presenting a tall, stately form, mien and outlines of striking presence, and came forward. Horror and grief were impressed on his pallid face, and his whole frame seemed to tremble as, after steadfastly scrutinizing us, he turned to me and said, to my surprise, in my own language, with a slight foreign accent, 'You are English, sir, if I mistake not. Will you render me some particulars of this sad tragedy? But we must hasten, and on the way you will tell me. Only say, now, there is still hope'

"I simply repeated the decision of the physician, when, smiting his brow, and exclaiming 'Poor Laura!' he left the apartment to reappear immediately, and once again we entered the waiting gondola, and were speeding swiftly over the waters on our return. His agony at my recital of the scene at the canal was fearful, and such was his anxiety to arrive in time, that my relief was intense when we at length reached the hut, where I had left my friend presiding as

guardian-angel beside the unhappy woman, whose suicide he had by his brave efforts only succeeded in delaying. Few painters could have selected a scene more striking than was presented in the little dwelling in which we were now assembled. The crowd, perhaps not unused to like spectacles, had grown weary, and were dispersed. The sun was setting, and through the western lattice, a bright ray lighted the bed on which lay the dark form of the dying, her face uplifted, with intense love and grief, to the object she had so fondly desired to behold once again ere the shades of eternal night should seal her earthly vision; the tall figure of the young noble, his costume rather that of the past than the present age, a scarlet mantle falling from his shoulders, a black plume drooping above his sad brow as he bent downward, his features convulsed with agitation, one hand clasped in hers, the other pressed to his heart, as if to stay its beating; on the other side of the bed, a monk in flowing black serge, his cowl thrown back, holding a rosary and crucifix illumined with the waning sunlight; then, Bolton, at a little distance, having retreated from his post as we entered, his appearance still dishevelled and face full of mournful sympathy. After brief consultation, I prevailed on him to delay no longer the necessary precaution of changing his wet garments, and amid the murmured *Aves* of the priest, and the absorption of the whole group, we silently glided from the hut. The next day my friend was unable to rise, and it was not till after a week had elapsed, that he was even partially recovered from the consequences of his chivalrous devotion in the cause of humanity; and the time allotted

for Venice being more than exhausted, we bade adieu to this fair city without further knowledge as to the final issue of the tragic adventure, in which, so soon after our arrival, we had become actors. Doubtless though, the poor Laura never again beheld the morning rays of the sun whose decline had lighted her dying pillow, and long ere this she sleeps the sleep that knows no waking. As we sailed away, our eyes lingered while a speck remained of the silent panorama fading in the distance, and as the towers of St Mark's buried their heads in the clouds, we recalled, with vivid interest, the beautiful devotee we had seen at the altar of the Virgin."

Mr. Stanmore's narrative excited deep emotion in his auditors, the fair portion of whom testified it by tears, the gentlemen by their unwearied attention.

"This must have been Hugh Bolton," said Everard; "you remember he was abroad at that time with Mr. Stepney."

"It agrees well with his knight-errantry," said Lord Egmont; "and he always had a passion for Italian. You remember, Faulkner, our passage at arms in the grove?"

"Perfectly," replied Everard; "and, with your pardon, I think he was victor in that tilt."

"The same," said Mr. Stanmore. "Mr. Stepney, who had been his tutor in early life, and to whom he witnessed extreme devotion, was a distant relative of Lord Howard, the then ambassador, and was a constant inmate of the embassy, whenever at Rome. Bolton exhibited striking traits in one so young, and I believe, with opportunity and further development,

will prove a man of mark some day. Where is he now?"

"In London," replied Everard, "brushing the cobwebs from dusty tomes and aspiring to become learned in the law."

"It is well suited to his genius," rejoined Mr. Stanmore, "his aptitude for study and persistent application, not to be diverted from the right path by any invitation of pleasure however seductive,—though upon occasion, he rapturously enjoyed what Italy presented, and was most diligent in research, both in nature and art. Lord Howard pronounced him a rising man, and wished to attach him to the embassy, but he courteously declined, upon the plea that he had other views and duties.

"The conventionalities and ceremonious persiflage of a diplomatic career,' he said to me, 'would interrupt the pursuit of the profession it is my purpose to acquire, and perhaps, as I am of mortal stuff like other young men, impair my taste and resolution, and after the present mission gives place to another, and we all return to England, industry and study may become dry and irksome. Moreover,' he added, 'my presence and protecting care are due to my widowed mother, and I will not protract my absence longer than Mr. Stepney requires my companionship.'"

"Characteristic of him at college," said Sir Ashleigh. "He then manifested the same qualities in the germ, and I predict his perseverance will propel him up the ladder in good time."

"But, Mr. Stanmore," interposed Miss Courtney, her eyelids still glittering with tear-drops at the story

of her country, "you have omitted an important item in your interesting episode,—the name of the young noble who, despite his picturesque costume, is, I fear, at best but a faithless lover."

He replied, after some hesitation, "You remember, the paper containing his name and address passed from my hands into his own. I knew nothing of Italian, and the novelty of my mission occupied me fully. Moreover, it is two years since. It was, I think, . . . Conte Stefano . . . . The last name I cannot recall. Oh, if Bolton were only here, you would, doubtless, learn it to the least, euphonious syllable."

The fair Venetian was profoundly agitated, but remaining silent, her emotion escaped observation except by Lady Isabel, who dexterously extricated her from the circle, on the pretext of repairing to the music-room.

"Do not, my dear cousin," said she, when they were alone, "I beseech you, base suspicion on so slender a foundation as a name far from uncommon. How unwise thus to create a phantom to mar your peace!"

"Oh, Isabel," she replied, "I fear it is he,—not the name merely, but his costume, retained only by a few of the ancient Venetian noblesse, his fluency in English, acquired from my father and familiar intercourse with us. You will allow there is at least some force in the evidence."

"None that might not equally apply to others. When does the period of probation prescribed by your father's will terminate?"

"In a few months," replied Lucia. "And how to endure until then the burden of doubt and suspicion, without a gleam of light!"



"Command yourself, my cousin, or perhaps it would be well to seek the privacy of your own apartment, until reflection shall restore your composure. I will guard your retreat and be your apologist to the circle we have left."

Miss Courtney gladly assented, and there, away from every eye, gave vent to the fervid feelings of her impulsive, impassioned nature, in bursts of weeping and the most agitated movements.

"Can he have become perjured and faithless, probably the betrayer of innocence? An actor in that fearful drama?" she added, shuddering. "But shall I believe such things of the companion of my childhood? What a fate is mine, if it be true! Is there no escape from a bond that will thus be rendered hateful?"

Lady Isabel rejoined her as speedily as practicable, and by argument and persuasion succeeded in partially allaying the storm a single name had created in the ardent soul of this daughter of the South; but the arrow was still there, pressed down far into the heart, and from that time, her eye was darker and more pensive, her laugh less frequent, and there seemed a tear in her voice, as she spoke or sang the songs of her sunny clime. Who that has ever known suspense that admits no solution, anxiety that must, perforce, be endured, will not award sympathy to the warm heart of the Italian girl in this, her initiation into life's disappointment, standing, as it were, beneath a heavy cloud that may enshroud a whirlwind of dismay, or by the sun's rays, become a sky of bright and golden hues?

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning was bright and clear, and, at breakfast, Mrs. Faulkner proposed to her guests a riding-party through some of the beautiful roads and lanes within the broad domains of Knowlton, which, moreover, presented frequent points of view, striking and worthy of admiration. The bow-windows of the breakfast-room offered an enticing prospect of emerald turf, roses, and blooming vines, and their hostess's proposal was received with exhilaration by the younger portion of the company, with pleased assent by the elder. In the choice between a carriage or equestrian excursion, preference was declared for the latter, only Lord Merindale deciding to accompany Mrs. Faulkner in her barouche, the effects of his accident still lingering, and, to the general surprise, Miss Courtney requesting the third seat with them, rather than the tempting exercise of which she was so fond, and the society of more youthful companions.

"My fair cousin is in unwonted mood this bright morning," said Lord Egmont; "usually so joyous and eager for any fresh project of pleasure, she now throws a shade over us all by withdrawing the light of her presence."

"Women are ever variable and capricious of will, Cousin Geoffrey," replied she; "it is our province in which your lordly sex permits indulgence. It is simply my pleasure to-day to enjoy the green fields and by-

ways with my uncle and Mrs. Faulkner. May I not have the privilege of possessing my soul in quiet for a brief hour?"

"Heyday, what's in the wind now, little Italia? Leave a gay party of equestrians for the sober converse of staid maturity!" said Lord Merindale.

"Nay, Zio caro," she answered, "do not withstand my whim, if it be one. *Dolce far niente* to my southern indolence, sometimes, you know, and to-day, the mood is irresistible with me."

And, as she spoke, her uncle observed an unusual expression in her dark eye, and something very like a tear glitter in the long lash that shaded it; but she turned quickly aside from his penetrating glance, and the suspicion of a shadow on a spirit naturally so cloudless, soon vanished from his mind as a mere transient delusion.

While preparations were in progress, the earl listlessly took a pamphlet from the table and was soon immersed in its contents.

"Stanmore!" he presently exclaimed, "have you read this essay? It is well written, and anonymous. Do you know the author?"

"I do not, my lord," he replied. "The title attracted my notice as I was leaving London, and seeking something *pour passer le temps* on the way. *Pretty considerable sharp*, as Mr. Richard Avenel said after his return from America."

"Everard, come hither," continued the earl, "and learn the crooked paths to be shunned by all who aspire to guide national affairs. Here is a bold rebuke, entitled 'Venalities of Legislation.' Seriously, though,"

he added, "the style is chaste and vigorous, evidently the production of a fresh, new quill. I should like to learn his name."

"Have you determined, Faulkner, to run the gauntlet?" inquired Mr. Stanmore.

"Some of the electors have done me the honor of proposing my standing for the borough," he replied, "and I shall soon begin canvassing among gentle and simple. A bore to one of my temperament," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "but I am resolved on going through the necessary evolutions in the contest. Let me have some suggestions from your experience in membership."

"Not so, my young friend, lest the practical side of it discourage your efforts and dispel the ardor natural in a *débutant*," answered Mr. Stanmore.

"You forget meanwhile, Hon. Member of the House of Commons," said the earl, "that there is another and more cheering side to the picture. The performance of duty which leading men owe to the public good, the sense of responsibility the exercise of that duty, if properly weighed, tends to cultivate, the avenue to fame and high reputation the office of legislator opens to young men of rank and fortune or of aspiring intellect, affording opportunity of devoting energy to the benefit of their fellow-creatures, instead of contributing devices to fill up the heavy hours in pleasure, indolently vegetating on their estates, or, I regret to add, as is too often the case, acquiring habits of vicious indulgence at Paris or Baden."

"Your lordship speaks warmly," said Everard.

"What then becomes of the large number whose path lies not in the devious highways of public life? Every man is not called to the nation's council halls."

"And therefore they escape the responsibility, at least, of such duties ignored," he replied. "But they who are fairly called may, I think, scarcely put aside, at will, a career, fraught with care and responsible duties, it is true, but also with honor and peace, if enacted conscientiously and to the full measure of ability. If I speak warmly, it is that I have so often witnessed, with pain, the proofs of time misspent, talent expended on trifles, men whose intellect might have shed lustre on our parliamentary annals, voting the industry and application necessary a sad bore, and making the business of life to consist in toilsome effort to *kill time*, on the continent, at clubs, or in whatever excitement a sated appetite may still endure, and when the harvest is past, they find themselves the victims of ennui, their vitiated indulgences hackneyed, and nothing in their hand save the reflection that they have lived for themselves alone."

"Does not your lordship describe the career of many a member of Parliament? Surely, their record is far from immaculate," said Everard.

"Too true," replied the earl; "but even then, if that record be not utterly void of utility, it is less guilty than his who refuses to subject one hour from his self-enjoyment to the common benefit. But I speak of the virtuous legislator, conscious of his responsibility, and so performing his duty as to be a blessing to the people he represents, and happy in his own disinterested devotion. Believe me, my dear young friend,

he only is the happy man, in any state of life, that follows the paths of virtuous exertion."

And now the party were all assembled before the portico, quickly mounted and off, every faculty apparently under influence of the inspiring sunshine, the verdure green and smooth as velvet, the air redolent of fragrance from the myriads of flowers that carpeted the meads and bordered the highways. Even the Lady Isabel threw aside some of her reserve and yielded to the full enjoyment of the excursion, the color on her pure cheek heightened by the exercise and infection of the merry laugh and harmless repartee that enlivened the converse.

"I remember," she remarked to Everard, her assiduous cavalier, "that some author says, 'he never sees kingcups and daisies without thinking of lambs and little children.' Is it not a pretty idea?"

"An imaginative simile, certainly," he replied. "I presume the illustration was founded on a single point of resemblance, unassuming simplicity, natural in the animate, indigenous to the inanimate"

"No country on the globe, I verily believe, presents such wild flowers as this merry England of ours," said Sir Ashleigh, reining up beside Miss Umberton. "The violet in her dingle, the cowslip, primrose, forget-me-not, heart's-ease, and countless others that delight the senses with their beauty and fragrance."

"Would you omit the lily of the valley, to which Solomon in all his glory could not compare in array?" interposed Miss Umberton. "Think of those exquisite little bells, modestly enfolding in the broad

green leaf, that seems to shield them from the rude winds as a mother the tender nursling."

"And the sweetbrier, the honeysuckle, the jasmine, and clematis," said her sister. "I cannot have the vines neglected."

The gallant cavaliers in attendance frequently alighted to gather treasures from nature's wealth from the copses and hedges along their path; and thus the gay young troop cantered on, like a May party decked in flowers of the field.

And where was the Venetian Lucia, hitherto ever wont to be the centre of such merry-making? Rolling gently along the same flower-besprinkled way with her staid companions, well content to escape the mirth and gaiety that found no echo in her heart. Doubt had invaded the soul hitherto unsullied by suspicion, and dropped its canker into her cup of joy. To Mrs. Faulkner the change was manifest; but her uncle saw not beneath the surface of the sportive sallies she affected, to elude the penetrating glance of an hour previous.

"I can conceive no stronger illustration of contrast," said Mrs. Faulkner to her, "than our stirring English life, its length and breadth of wood and forest, the chorus of birds, varied tints of leaf and flower, the animal creation we find so essential to our necessities, presents to your southern home, with its atmosphere of palace and gondola, with scarce a sound to break the living stillness. Confess that, to your youthful eye, it seemed another planet."

"The transposition would, doubtless, have been more astonishing to me, madam," she replied, "had

not my whole being been so engrossed with a recent sorrow. And, then, it was at quiet Merindale that I was first initiated into English life. Nevertheless, it was striking even there, and in nothing of the material order so much as the mode of locomotion. For the summer months, my father repaired to the Friuli mountains, or his villa on the Brenta, where nature is luxuriant to excess, though wearing a different aspect to that which now surrounds us. Our spring foliage soon changes its hue of tender green, and we have not the same little flowerets, but those of larger growth and richer dye, and no gales nor frosts to nip their glory. What can you give us in lieu of our vineyards and orange-groves?"

"Nay, my dear young lady, I mean not any disparaging comparison," said Mrs. Faulkner, "in depicting the obvious difference. Venice was to me replete with interest and attraction, nor shall I ever revert to my brief sojourn there without tender and mournful sensations." ●

"It is plain, madam," resumed Lord Merindale, after a short pause, "that you permit no sportsman's hostile tread within your demesne. Harken, Lucia, and say if harp or Italian lute can equal its music."

She listened, entranced, to the notes of the black-bird, thrush, linnet, bullfinch, as they sang or piped in the hawthorn hedge on either side, which, though not yet in blossom, had put forth its sheltering leaves for their accustomed nests.

"The sporting quarter of Knowlton," replied Mrs. Faulkner, "which my son calls his *seat of war*, is within the boundaries, but at a safe distance from



these little servitors, which, with instinctive caution, build under protection, from year to year. The sportsman's game, you know, my lord, is more shy, and thus, unwittingly, they fall into the net of the spoiler by retreating from domestic habitation. I cherish these little innocents as protégés of my own, and they form with me one of the charms of rural life."

"I love ornithology," said Lucia. "The instincts and habits of this part of creation possess to me a lively interest. Do you know, Mrs. Faulkner, my father would oftentimes recognize an English bird in Italy, which he pronounced a refugee from cold and fog, seeking the bright skies and abundant seeds of the warm South?"

"Perchance," she replied, smiling at the naive advocacy of her country by the Italian girl, "it was my goldfinch sometimes, that vanishes with the early hoar-frost, and reappears in the birch near my window with the balmy gales of spring."

● The clatter of hoofs behind interrupted their quiet discourse, and Lord Egmont appeared, laden with blooming spoils from wood and dell, which he poured into the lap of his fair cousin, filling the air they breathed with sweetest odors. Who does not love the beautiful little gems wherewith the kindly earth decks herself, breathing incense of dewy fragrance, better than the gorgeous exotics of conservatory or rich parterre? Behold the garniture of the lily in the robe she neither sewed nor spun, and yet, dwelling far down in the shade of the valley, gives freely of her fragrance alike to the swain as to the noble,—or the violet, nestling in the green moss bank, its tiny leaves enclosing the bouquet

where the wild bee sucks for sweetness,—or the little forget-me-not, fringing the nameless rill on either bank,—or the lowly daisy, or yellow crocus like spots of gold amid the grass,—or the first child of spring, the primrose, braving the lingering blast, and white as the late snow-wreath that would fain enshroud it in its chill mantle,—or the wild rose, in some nook by the way-side, unlike her queenly sisters, content to blossom apart from the haunts of men? But of England's field-flowers the name is legion, and we must pause ere the list is scarce begun.

"Oh, you beautiful darlings!" exclaimed Lucia, her face changing from pensive to bright, and glowing with pleasure. She was passionately devoted to flowers, and an ardent botanist.

"What a harvest of treasures you have reaped, cousin!" she continued: "how I thank you!"

She then began assorting them into a bouquet, and in a musical warble, sang,—

"Flowers, flowers, come forth, 'tis spring,  
Stars of the woods, the vales and dells,  
Fair valley-lilies, come forth and ring,  
In your green turrets, your silvery bells."

And she, laughingly, shook a lily at her uncle.

"Whose pretty lines are those, that flow so aptly from your lips to charm our ears?" inquired Mrs. Faulkner.

"I cannot tell, madam," she replied; "I found them in some old Floral Genealogy."

"Your progress has been slow," now interposed Egmont; "the cavalcade has for some time awaited your arrival at the trysting-place on the Hermitage

Knoll, where Everard, in his rôle of cicerone, promises to emulate Mrs. Radcliffe in narrating the mysteries of the picturesque and deserted structure that has suddenly risen to view and excited our curiosity to learn its history."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Faulkner, with a grave smile, "thereby indeed hangs a wondrous tale of by-gone times, over true to be called a legend, whose details have been religiously preserved by desire of the chief actor, and transmitted from one generation to another till the present."

They proceeded with more rapid pace, and soon joined the gay party, which had now alighted, and were occupying rustic seats on a verdant knoll, shaded by huge oaks and overhanging a small valley, shut in from any other view by an opposite ridge, thickly wooded, but less elevated than the knoll, above which stretched a long vista of hill and dale, a river glittering with diamond lustre in the sunbeams, and in summer-time, aided by a telescope, might be discovered the hop-gardens of Kent with their slender poles and their useful drapery. In the little valley, now robed in the fresh, tender green of early spring, not a sound broke the deep silence save the twitter of a stray bird on the wing, as if affrighted at the echo of his note in the loneliness, or the gurgling of a brook still murmuring in its onward flow, recking little of the swell of years into centuries, the change of seed-time and harvest, or of nature in her decay or her resurrection. In the most secluded part of this valley stood a low building, apparently of unhewn stone, whose inequalities of construction were completely mantled by ivy in "its

solitary grace." A willow, whose gnarled trunk bespoke its antiquity, waved its slender wand above it on one side, the only tree that did not seem indigenous, others, a birch and aspen, of later growth, united to render more dense the close canopy. There was no architectural pretension nor ornament, unless what appeared to be a hatchment over the rude door might so be called, and a stone cross in front like a sentinel, standing firm and solid as ever, while he who once bowed before it had, long since, crumbled into dust. The windows were shut, and on either side, and not far from the entrance, were two seats of the trunks of trees, either rent by the chance storm that had intruded into this mute retreat, or fallen beneath the scythe of time. All was in preservation, evidently a careful warder watched, vigilantly, against sacrilege or encroachment of ruin.

"In good truth, madam," said the lively Miss Umberton, "your opportune appearance saves us from dying of curiosity to learn the story of this romantic spot, which Mr. Faulkner calls the Hermitage, whose mysteries he only awaits the arrival of your party to unravel."

They also exchange the carriage for seats on the green knoll; and, after due interval allowed for admiring exclamations from the new-comers, all were silent, and Everard proceeded:

"It was in the thirteenth century that one of my ancestors, styled in Norman-French, Seaton Vere de Folkner, when scarcely past the era of manhood, left his home and country for the Crusades. He was not the head of the house, but a younger brother, the idol

of his mother's heart, and endeared to all by his gentle refinement and studious devotion. Grave, but not taciturn, by day, a recluse in some rural haunt without other society than the immortal dead in their works, he would, at its close, re-enter the halls of his fathers, to charm the assembled guests with the rich stores of his learned research, not for applause, or for what seemed alike indifferent, to win the approving smile of beauty, but as if in rapt inspiration from the great minds in which he had just been revelling. A rigid devotee, and versed in all the poetic lore of the Crusades, and the heroic achievements of the gallant knights that made that great romance of the Middle Ages illustrious, when the last flickering devotion of Catholic Europe again marshalled a mighty host, with Saint Louis as the great captain and motive spirit, to deliver, by sword and lance, from the Infidel, the sepulchre of the Prince of Peace, the exalted imagination of the young de Folkner caught the flame, and naught could extinguish his burning zeal to enrol himself among the soldiers of the Cross.

"Two years elapsed, and he was heard of at Malta, preparing, by fast and vigil, to enter the noble Order of the Knights of St. John. Another year, and through an incoherent epistle from his foster-brother, Godfrey, who had followed his fortunes in capacity of esquire, Philippe de Folkner was summoned in haste, ere his waning life should expire, with no kindred beside the dying-bed to weep his early death. The mother had not long survived the parting with her youngest-born, and slept in the stately mausoleum of the ancient line. Speedily as intervening space rendered possible, Sir

Philippe journeyed to the spot, imagination picturing, as he went, the lifeless form of one who had, a few years since, moved among them a model of grace and manly dignity, whose exploits in field and tournament, as knight and crusader, he had hoped would shed lustre on his house and country. Arrived at Malta, he stands beside the lowly pallet of the long-absent and tenderly cherished brother. He still lived, but raving in the wild extravagance of brain fever, his head closely shorn of the brown locks his mother had so proudly entwined, and so emaciated and changed that even that tender mother had not known her child. To Sir Philippe's queries, Godfrey replied in evident constraint, praying that he would waive for the present all solution of this dreadful visitation, and the strange words the sufferer uttered in his delirium. By fresh medical advice, increase of comforts, and the richest cordials wealth could procure, after twenty-four hours the fever subsided, leaving him weak as infancy, but calm and rational. When his brother's presence was cautiously communicated, he had well-nigh relapsed into frenzy; but by degrees it seemed to soothe and comfort him, though powerless to dispel the deep gloom of his brow or unseal the lips so eloquent in the past. At length, as day after day rolled on, bringing strength to his frame, Sir Philippe determined to solve this mystery, and with kindness, but with the authority considered in that age the lawful attribute of the chief of the house, he elicited the following narrative:

"By the conspicuous sanctity of his daily life, his extraordinary zeal in maintaining those 'combats with

the world, the flesh, and the devil,' literally enjoined by the forms of the brotherhood, Seaton De Folkner, now no longer immersed in the varied lays of troubadours or historic annals, his studies strictly limited to the diffuse and stern minutia of monastic law and superstitious tradition, was admitted to fellowship in the renowned Order of St. John, before attaining the maturity that might in others have been deemed indispensable to stability of resolution. While panting for the hour that would bear their martial hosts from the rocky isle to do battle for recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, when he should, by mighty deeds of valor, win his spurs, he was wont to give unwearied observance to the rule imposing 'offices in behalf of the sick and destitute.' In his fanatical zeal, he would repair to Valetta, through the burning highways, his feet all unused to aught harder than the moss of English Knowlton in his rambles, or the soft product of Turkish looms within its halls, shod but with sandals.

"One summer's day, entering a squalid hut, a scene presented itself destined to color his future life and mournfully change its sequel. The hut contained but two beings, a woman ghastly with disease and penury, and what seemed to him an angel descended from Paradise, standing beside her. His frame, weakened by fasting and penance, his mind imbued with belief in miraculous visions, legends of saints, and supernatural cures, he did not at all doubt that he was in presence of a celestial messenger from the skies; and powerless to avert his gaze from the angelic figure before him, he stood, bowed as if in adoration, his dark cassock outlined in the light of the

door-way, and cap of the Order, half military, half monkish, thrown back as he entered, developing the attenuated but classic features of the English noble, and hand uplifted as if to bless, transfixed by the beatific apparition before him. The *angel*, as he thought, was attired in a flowing robe of gray, black cross on the breast, and veil of pure white falling on each side of the face to the feet. No color tinged the pale cheek, rendering more striking the eyes, black and of unearthly brilliancy, and the regular pencilling of the lash and eyebrow. It was not strange that such orbs should have been deemed more meet for seraphs than for the daughters of men. But the trance of the young Knight of St. John was dispelled by the voice of the suffering occupant of the poor bed bidding him enter, and the consequent change of position in the bending form beside her, and he awoke to behold, not a spirit from Paradise, but a creature of flesh and blood, in whose costume he recognized a novice of the Order of Gray Nuns from Spain, of which there was a convent near by. In sweet, low lones, she spoke a few words to the object of her ministrations, and saying, as she passed, *padre tu benedicion*, vanished, when scarcely had the Knight of St. John but partially recovered from his illusion, murmured, above her kneeling figure, *dios te benediga, hija*. Weeks rolled by, and he saw her no more, and if, amid the absorption of his calling, the recollection of the incident sometimes mingled, it was ever with the first conception of the beautiful vision as of no earthly mould. But fate, that so often appears to work its will by devious, unlooked-for chances, decreed they should again encounter. It was



on the outskirts of Valetta, not far from the convent walls, that Seaton De Folkner was moodily returning from one of his pious pilgrimages, when he heard a shriek of distress, and hastening to the spot, beheld a woman struggling in the grasp of a bandit, who, at the approach of aid, precipitately fled, releasing his frightened captive, now fallen insensible to the ground. Again was the angel of the hut before him, lying as one dead, and mutely appealing to him for succor. Lifting her light form from the earth, he chafed her hands and administered the medicaments he bore in his charitable rounds, and soon beheld, unclosing, those dark eyes he had supposed could only pertain to an inhabitant of the celestial world. She trembled violently, as if still believing herself in the rude grasp of the bold robber, and it needed many words of soothing assurance to calm the beating heart almost wild with terror. She strove to withdraw from his support, but the shock was too recent; and more than an hour passed ere her tottering steps enabled her to regain the outer lodge of the convent, when she disappeared from view. Out of the vivid interest of this brief hour sprung up in the virgin heart of the young Knight of St. John a germ of new emotion, whose stormy tide neither sworn vows, nor stern rules, nor scourge of penance, nor invocation of saints could avail to stem. Her eyes scarce uplifted, and no words save a broken entreaty for release, in melodious Castilian; while, on his side, constrained to support her weakness, and in the same tongue solicit, in the eloquent flow of earlier days, that she would await return of strength, and yet love, that has no dial whereby to measure its growth, attained

within him a full mastery that should know no decline while life remained. Long after, was he rent by agonies of remorseful contrition, and rigid were the mortifications and penances with which he endeavored to purify his conscience from the accusations of involuntary sacrilege and sin of broken vows, but such memories seldom fade or die; and oftentimes would there rise to his view the bold relief of that chiselled beauty his arm had succored and perforce sustained. Thus did the conflict of contending passion rage fearfully for months, till in one of the pilgrimages his restlessness made more urgent, he was passing the convent about twilight, when a tolling bell announced a spirit passing away from earth. Struck by mysterious presentiment, he bethought him of the hut where he had first beheld the object of his sleeping and waking dreams, and hurrying thither, made almost inarticulate inquiry of its inmate respecting the knell even now sounding faintly in the distance.

“‘Ah, father!’ she replied with sobs and tears, ‘it is for the blessed Sister Inez your reverence remembers to have seen in my poor hovel last summer. Old Sister Ursula from the convent has but gone as your reverence entered, and she tells me the heavenly saint has been ailing since the day she was frightened on the road to Valetta, and as Sister Ursula believes, by the devil himself, for who else would harm an angel like that? She returned nearly fainting, and has seldom left her cell since that day. And Sister Ursula says the dear saint spoke strange things in her delirium, and asked for penance as if the innocent lamb had ever sinned! Ah, if ever there was a pure spirit it was Sis-

ter Inez, and now she is dying, and I shall never more look upon her lovely face and hear her sweet words of comfort !'

"Transfixed with a feeling of grief and despair, the young knight stood speechless while the weeping pauper continued ; then abruptly quitting the hut, regained his dwelling, and it was after repeated paroxysms of frenzy that his faithful esquire made the summons that brought Sir Philippe to his bedside. The day succeeding his story, he demanded an interview with the Grand Master, and after confession, was, though offered absolution for the sins of the heart, deposed from the Holy Order of St. John at his own desire. When enabled to journey by slow degrees, he consented to return to England, to die amid the shades of Knowlton, on condition that he should never be required to dwell within its luxurious halls, but in a rude abode in the valley that was once a favorite resort. He survived two years in the habitation before you, a melancholy devotee, sternly observing all the austerities of penance and self-denial possible, and forbidding his sepulture in the vaults of his forefathers, as one who had committed sacrilege and forfeited solemn vows, by permitting love to enter his heart. He was interred within the rude structure that had witnessed the throes of his remorse and his untiring devotion. Hence, it is a spot preserved with sacred care by each succeeding generation, and the history of the lone hermit has ever constituted a solemn tradition in the archives of Knowlton. The portrait of Seaton Vere de Folkner, as he was in his youth, when the pride of his house and the happy student in the green bowers of his ancestral domains,

hangs in the west gallery, and may be known by the long, dark locks that wave from his intellectual brow.

“And now, praying the forgiveness of my indulgent audience for the prolixity of my narrative, we will, if it be their pleasure, remount, in search of prospects less mournful in retrospect, and more modern in association.”

Everard received the thanks of his interested listeners, and deemed his most coveted reward the tear that bedewed the cheek of the sympathizing Lady Isabel.

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## CHAPTER IX.

SPRING, with her “bloom of green” and variegated pearls, and prismatic showers of dewy April, and mornings of fragrant freshness, and evenings of cool moonlight, now, like a young maiden in blush of modest grace, retires before the gorgeous summer; the tender leaflet has donned a deeper dye and expanded into the branching shade for the stately deer or lowing herd in the ardent noontide. The sun, revelling in its golden splendor, tarries long in diurnal space, till creation, sated with luxury, becomes still and listless in nature’s reflection. Thus awhile, and soon the king of day counts fewer hours from dawn to his decline, and fading flower and russet leaves and brown moor and stealthy frost and wreath of mist proclaim the autumn of the year. Plenty rears thick her pointed stacks, and chorus of flail and harvest-home, in one accord, make loud echo in the ripened field. The reaper, weary as when the

"curfew tolled the knell of parting day," plods homeward to his rest, with stars to light his path and glow-worm's little flash, and sleeps the dreamless sleep, the balm of wholesome toil and boon of "lids unsullied by a tear." The bird that sang, unseen, in copse and hedge the summer long, now shivering in the early gale on solitary perch, awaits the trysting hour to wing his flight with marshalled hosts to southern skies of fadeless flowers, where perennial palms give friendly covert, and unknown the snow and frost of Britain's sea-girt isle. There is a bird, I know not if it dwell amid the oaks whence England frames her wooden walls, which in Columbia we call *Cedar*. Fain in its golden plumes would it beseem the captive songster from Canary Isles. It loves the tiny seeds, and well must the gardener watch to shield his harvest for esculents of the coming year. It lights on the cedar's dark-green sprig or the branching fir, like yellow tufts of native growth, and has but one plaintive note as if to lament the lovely summer's death.

Brown autumn, more than the buds of spring or wealth of summer's floral crown, delights the sportsman's heart. Where grouse, and quail, and plover hie, thither he wends his way; and now the silence of the morn breaks into echo of the frequent shot. Gay is the hunter's lodge, and emulous, when night calls home the guests, their rival zeal to reckon the game each one has bagged.

Such is the life of man. A spring of fragrant promise; summer of corn and wine and oil; and autumn of fruition, with its harbingers of demise, soon to be real, in the winding-sheet that wraps all nature in its white ex-

panse. There is no age in Time ; fresh as when the first stars sang for joy, he speeds his constant round, nor rests his ruthless wing even while we sleep and take no note, and does but strike his fleeting hour by day, to tell us it has passed to live no more.

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## CHAPTER X.

WE parted with Hugh Bolton at the threshold of Merindale House, in London, as he was modestly retreating, after his anonymous attendance on its lord, amid the storm and sleet of a winter's day. With all his signs of manly independence and practised estimate of meretricious advantage, he was young and but mortal ; therefore, if the transient glimpse of a courtly hall and the group we pictured within it, made more sensible the gloom and discomfort of the outer world as he turned to retrace his steps in pursuance of his primary object, or if, in regaining his homely chambers in the Temple, there was a feeling of dissatisfaction at the simplicity of his appointments hitherto unknown, and if there arose in his breast a desire for the refinements of wealth, and rank, and intercourse with the privileged caste, whose doors unfold not to mere intellect until it has wrought an aristocratic pre-eminence, the temptation was neither singular nor unnatural. Nay, if, for a few days, there was outlined, as in a magic mirror, among dry statutes and musty enactments, the memory of that graceful arm, and he seemed again to hear the

musical cadence, *Oh, Zio caro*, it was but transient and venial. To indulge unattainable longings, to build *Châteaux en Espagne*, comported neither with Hugh Bolton's high resolve, nor the well-founded principles that ruled his daily life. The bright imagery soon faded as a phantom of the past, and he plunged into the winding labyrinth of his chosen profession with renewed assiduity, finding his chief rest and relaxation in change of study and reading. There is a difference, wide as the poles, between the mere reader for pastime and the ardent lover of elegant literature. The first finds little difficulty in subjecting this inclination to circumstance and convenience, and knows nothing of the fountain of pleasure that wells up in the heart of the latter like a sympathetic chord, linking his very soul to that of his author, still living in his works, though no longer of earth. He thirsts for such communion with a craving that must be satisfied, and it is his banquet of purest joy and richest refreshment. Such an ardent lover was Hugh Bolton. At his allotted time, and not till then, he would exchange the vellumed records of laws, their expositions and illustrations of precedent, for the varied stores of that field of ever-blooming flowers endowed by the living and bequeathed by the dead long mouldering in the dust, an immortal heritage of imperishable thoughts and ripe culture.

Far be it from the writer to enter with rash foot that noble field with its diverse domains, and presumptuously attempt to enumerate those classic walks of poetry, criticism, essay, or the central crown of high art, history. Time would fail to tell the number of the

stars with which Britain, in illustrious supremacy, has enlightened the world, and for which she merits the gratitude and admiration of mankind in all ages. But to think of the massive minds, the lofty imaginations, the gift of song, the power of wit, the point of sarcasm, of the successive galaxies of genius that have made that little island so distinguished and glorious, dazzles the mental vision.

Hugh Bolton's natural taste and intuitive perception of lofty themes and true genius were cultivated by the discriminating guidance of the accomplished Mr. Stepney in early life, and after, by his learned masters at Oriel. They guarded him against the allurements, so tempting to young minds imbued with a passion for letters, indulgence in desultory research,—a habit easily acquired, difficult to overcome, and detrimental to profound attainment. He had, with all his appreciation and energy, scarcely yet even surveyed that mighty field, few, in the brief span of human life, are privileged to compass; but he advanced with firm, persevering step in the path opening to his clear, penetrating glance, gleaned, as he went, precious fruits from those trees of knowledge whose leaves are of perpetual verdure.

The distinctive characteristic we have ascribed to his boyhood and youth continued to strengthen his manhood with its vigorous elixir—indomitable perseverance in what he deemed duty, freedom from fickleness,—in fine, the quality, often misapplied, of *moral courage*. He dared to do right, undaunted by ridicule of less strict constructionists, and found his reward in the calm peace and dignity of a good conscience, and the



high enjoyment of noble aims. Instances of this might be cited at different periods; we will simply quote the offer presented him of diplomatic position, related by Mr. Stanmore. His age, circumstances of station, the opportunity of entering public life under brilliant auspices, admission to the most recherché society, fascinations of courtly ceremonial, the countless attractions of a residence at Rome, with duties sufficiently nominal for indulgence either of the study or admiration of art and pursuit of the varied pleasures with which the Eternal City abounds, assuredly made this act of grace from a British ambassador tempting enough. But he had determined his future vocation, and wisely judged that to fritter away a few years in a conventional routine of diplomatic forms would seriously encroach on the plans he had formed after due reflection, and, perchance, unfit him altogether for its acquirement. And who will not commend this only son of a mother who was a widow for his refusal to place the broad sea between them? Could he consent to remove the sunshine of her existence, the comfort and happiness of his living presence, the joy of his coming step, the fullness of content at the music of his voice? He believed the path of duty the way of true peace, and decided wisely and well, for this world as well as that which is to come.

In the busy world of London his circle of acquaintance was limited, — of friends, narrower still. The head of the banking house to which his father was attached now ranked as a retired millionaire, in full enjoyment of splendid opulence and the liberal dispenser of elegant hospitality. To his house Hugh had

at all times free access, and not unfrequently had the privilege of association with minds of a high order in the lighter departments of belles-lettres, or of others who, after probation like his own present experience, presented encouragement embodied in men learned in the law, elevated by patient toil from the rudiments of jurisprudence to eminence and distinguished respect. Nor was this goodly company without the graceful relief of the gentler sex in due proportion, in the wife and daughters of the genial host and their guests of divers grades of attraction.

Accidental associations in the Temple also occasionally elicited congeniality in mind as well as pursuit. In one instance, meanwhile, a bond had its origin in certain assimilation of tastes and the paradoxical interest of incongruity of habits.

A student of the Temple from North Wales, named Pengreaves, had chambers contiguous to Hugh Bolton's, so that frequent chance encounters engendered first friendly sociality, culminating in daily companionship. The young Welshman was of active, inquiring mind, and sprightly intellect. His colloquial talent was rare, and Hugh delighted to listen to his vivid delineation of his picturesque country, its quaint dialect and primitive customs, with the traditions of its bards and minstrels. It was not long, however, ere he discovered in his new friend less devotion to study and prolonged absences,—his appearance, on returning, indicative of participation in pleasures incompatible with the attainment to which he aspired. Transition from the simple life of North Wales and its rural enjoyments to the artificial fascinations and novel entice-

ments of London, offered temptations stronger than the impressible temper of Pengreaves could withstand, and he had yielded to the influence of the gay and licentious, never wanting as aids to the prince of this world, and ever on the alert to seduce the unwary from the paths of virtue and peace. With his high-toned sense of duty and religion, Hugh Bolton might, perhaps, have been justified in withdrawing at once from a companion that had thus wandered into the broad road whose end is ruin. Had he thenceforth exchanged the confiding mien of friendship for the cold gravity of reproof, or shunned corrupting contact by avoiding intercourse, he would, most likely, have been applauded by the stern moralist, or the "righteous over-much;" but what verdict would the monitor, his conscience, have pronounced for enacting a duty at best but negatively selfish, and ignoring all effort in behalf of his neighbor, which circumstances seemed to render positive? With tact and delicacy, he adopted a course that brought, after sundry trials and discouragements, its ultimate compensation in the grateful affection and honorable success of the object of his interest. Far from presuming to rebuke or to evince a pharisaical deportment when they met, he deepened the tone of his cordial welcome and exhibited increased enjoyment of his narratives of home-life in his far-off land, often, by gentle, imperceptible design, led him to discourse freely of the loved fireside circle. Such conversation was not unfrequently bedewed by contrite tears of the young prodigal, at the recollections thus evoked of former innocence, and the consciousness of pain his lapse from virtue would cause.

Further to promote his purpose of saving his friend from the yawning whirlpool, Hugh would sometimes lay aside a chosen belles-lettres recreation for some project of refined, harmless pleasure in the walks of art in her sundry forms, or procure access to curious debate, or, again, to the House of Commons, where the oratory of a Brougham or a Peel would excite their emulation to rise likewise by energy of talent to a summit of lofty pre-eminence. And, with the prompt co-operation of its loving mistress, in his weekly returns to his home at the Manor, Hugh Bolton was always accompanied by the young and homeless stranger, now buoyant with happy anticipation of the promised holiday, and revelling in the hospitality and varied sports of English country life, artlessly contrasting its novelties with the usages of his land of hill and crag. Sunday witnessed their decorous attendance at the parish church, of which Mr. Stepney was the esteemed rector, good Mr. Boynton having left the world, ripe in age as in good works. Henceforth fair Moreton parsonage, with its venerable gables, fragrant roses, and loving atmosphere, opened wide its doors as well to the wanderer from Wales as to his companion who had grown up beneath its sheltering eaves, its master, with ready benevolence, entering into Hugh's ardent but undemonstrative exertion for the recovery of one whose feet had well-nigh become entangled in the meshes of hopeless vice. Will not the reader admit the wisdom of this course rather than the other? Doubtless it cost Hugh Bolton self-sacrifice and effort; but was not his recompense adequate in the result? The opposite seems the most natural because more

generally followed. The young Welshman was a stranger—an accidental acquaintance,—and if left to pursue his own chosen devices, of what importance to the majority, save a passing regret, speedy indifference, final abandonment and contempt? To love our neighbor is not always easy, but its difficulties are only to be planed by practical exercise.

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## CHAPTER XI.

As the two friends of whom we discoursed in the preceding chapter were sauntering through one of the broad parks of London, during the autumn of the same year whose spring had bloomed in such luxuriance for the happy party at Knowlton, their attention was arrested by the striking exterior of a gentleman closely enveloped in a roquelaure, his stately mien and distinctive costume indicating a foreign origin, confirmed by the Italian language in which he was addressing another who accompanied him. It was the hour of twilight, and as they passed onward in an opposite direction, Hugh started and paused, exclaiming as if involuntarily, gazing after the receding figure,—

“Strangel!”

“What is strange?” inquired Pengreaves.

“The voice of the tall personage we were remarking. It is not new to me, and yet I cannot recall an association to identify its owner.”

“Think you that a very strange thing, my prince of

philosophers?" said the merry Welshman, laughing. "Verily, I should be forever in a maze of fancied reverberation by such a rule. When first transported from that favored region under the patronage of St. David to this modern Babel, many were the intonations that fell upon my unsophisticated ear as of a like key with sundry Ap-Catesbys and Pen-Edwins I had left behind."

"The voice that has just struck me with such force is, however, uncommon enough to make an impression, if once heard," replied Bolton, "and I cannot but feel that there is some strong association connected with it."

After further raillery from his companion, they turned to other topics less obscure, and the incident was forgotten. The next morning, Hugh received a summons to the Manor, and in an hour was on the way thither. He found his mother in great excitement of feeling under momentous tidings from Scotland. Her only brother, who had succeeded to the Lairdship of Bournlee, was just dead, and Hugh's presence was imperatively demanded before his will should be opened. He, therefore, of necessity, hastily prepared for a journey to the Highlands.

The following sketch will serve as elucidation at this juncture: The father of Mrs. Bolton had lived and died a thriftless laird, retaining little beside his hereditary entailed patrimony, the barren acres of Bournlee, on which he subsisted to a good old age, leaving his heir the inheritance of a decayed mansion and unfruitful lands, with the remnants of such flocks as the reivers and lifters from the fastnesses around had spared, without funded income, either for his mainte-

nance or the improvement of his possessions. But the heir had not been a passive, uninterested spectator and victim of the listless indolence and ruinous neglect that had reduced the lairdship to a state far less productive than the most inconsiderable farm of that region. No sooner, therefore, was he endowed with the mastery, than he placed a factor, with subordinates, in charge of Bournlee, empowered to drain, enrich, and in every practicable way improve and redeem the impoverished inheritance, while he himself repaired to the busy mart of Glasgow and embarked in a lucrative commerce. Thrifty and frugal as his father had been the reverse, by enterprise and industry he succeeded, in a few years, in amassing a fortune comprising a rich appendage to the barren title he had inherited. His first act was to appropriate a portion of the fruit of his successful ventures to a notable renovation of the home of his ancestors. Proceeding thither, he found the hitherto unproductive wastes redeemed by diligent agriculture, the entire domain scarcely recognizable under the hand of skilful toil, and resolved to demolish the dilapidated abode of his fathers, and rear in its place a mansion more in keeping with his improved fortunes. Accordingly, there soon rose on the ruins of the old structure a new edifice of larger dimensions and of modern architecture, and consigning to the lumber garret the antiquated high-backed chairs, lofty testers, and moth-eaten sofas of past generations, he adorned the new abode with the comfortable elegance of later inventions. While in Glasgow, he had married a pretty young widow, who, after two years' hard experience of unwelcome dependence, was not reluctant to exchange it

for the offered opulence of the thrifty merchant from the Highlands. She brought with her an infant daughter of three years, the child of her first marriage, and in course of time, and to the extreme disappointment of the laird, added another of the same sex. The ruling ambition of Bournlee was the possession of an heir, on whom to centre the entailed patrimony of his ancient house, with the fortune to maintain its dignity, founded by his energy and self-denial. But this desire was not granted. Janet was the sole issue of his marriage, and after all hope of a male heir in direct line was reluctantly relinquished, he turned his eyes to the next in succession to the entail, the son of his forgotten and neglected sister. Deprecating the idea of his hard-earned wealth becoming the heritage of a spendthrift, he opened correspondence with the banking house of which Hugh's father had been a member, to ascertain the character of his successor. All inquiries being satisfactorily solved, he without delay caused his will to be executed, and after a few months, death, that respects neither the thrifty nor the improvident, summoned him from the world, of which he had been so busy and calculating a member.

With novel and somewhat dreamy sensations, did Hugh Bolton set forth on his journey northward, his curiosity naturally excited by his unexpected summons, and his interest strongly enkindled, as he approached for the first time the land of his maternal ancestors, so rich in romantic, traditionary legend, song, and ballad, and in varied picturesque nature. Bournlee was situated not far from Blair-Athol, and while the passage of centuries had not failed to smoothe the rugged highways of



the country through their scientific appliances, yet its distinctive features remained as on that midsummer day, when, near this wild mountain-pass, the decisive battle of Killiecrankie was fought, which gave to it an ineffaceable historic impress, and rendered it ever memorable by the fall of the gallant Dundee, known in legend and story as Grahame of Claverhouse. There are still the shaggy woods and clefts and mountain summits and black rushing torrents; but over that field of bloody carnage the harebell and thistle have grown and blossomed under the same summer sun, as if no tread of armed hosts had ever invaded their peaceful domain. Hugh, though absorbed with conjecture and anticipation as he drew near the end of his sudden journey, was far from obtuse at the appearance of the bold scenery on his route, so different from all he had before known. He occasionally alighted from the chaise he had hired at the last inn, when the ascent along the turnpike road, that constituted the modern avenue, became abrupt, and proceeded on foot along the bank covered with heather, now brown with autumn, and crisp beneath his step. One of the most enviable qualities of the young heart, not yet indurated by satiety or the iron mallet of experience, is the capacity for fresh enjoyment, delight in novelty, of whatever kind, the power of ready appetency for happy surprise. Time discolors objects of minor character as it dims the polished marble and crumbles it to dust, and little of earth's attractions survives its evolutions save human love, whose immortal principle defies its assaults. As Hugh Bolton at length stood upon the level that overlooked the famous Highland-pass, he forgot his mysterious

summons, now near its solution, while gazing down upon the rude cleft and rocks, draped with the weeping birch, its leaves whirling through the chasm, sere and dry in the early frost, and recalled the words of Lochiel, the great Highland chief as he stood in the same spot long years past, that "the ring of their battle-cry sounded loud and full in the proud height of the mountain, while that of the foe beneath them was but faint and feeble."

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## CHAPTER XII.

IN childhood Hugh Bolton was wont to listen, with intense delight, to his mother's reminiscences of her Highland home, which the good lady would depict in colors so vivid and with such loving partiality, freely intermingling legend and superstition, as to convert the oft-repeated story into a fairy picture to his boyish imagination. But so thorough had been the absorption of the late laird in the one idea of his life, the retrieval of his decayed fortunes, that the separation between the brother and sister had at length resulted in non-intercourse, and Hugh seldom remembered his Scotch uncle nor the possible accession to the lairdship. And such was the true, manly simplicity of his nature, and the singleness of purpose that actuated him in the achievement of his own part in the world, that he scarcely realized a change in regard to himself had been wrought, not by his agency, but by the great innovator, death, in removing from life another whose

place he was to fill, until the formal marks of respect and consideration with which he was received on reaching his unexpected inheritance, gave evidence too palpable to be ignored. The funeral services, which had awaited his arrival, and at which he officiated as chief mourner, were at once solemnized, and the late Laird of Bournlee, with his busy plans, his ambitious aggrandizement and pride of success, was laid beside his thriftless, needy sire, their paths so widely diverging in life, now converging to the one point, in a like silence and immobility,—“dust to dust, earth to earth.”

The advocate, the depository of the will, had come from Edinburgh, and the library was thrown open for the reception of those interested in its decrees. The number was not large. The widow, in mourning weeds, was there attended by her daughters of the first and second marriage, the family physician, the minister of the kirk, the advocate, Mr. Johnstone and witnesses, with Hugh Bolton, the new laird, composed the grave audience present.

After a short, solemn silence, the will was commenced, as follows :

“The Lairdship of Bournlee descended to me from my late father, barren and impoverished. It has through my labors become rich and fruitful. The fortune I have accumulated in no way appertains to the entailed estate, but being the product of my own toil and enterprise, is at my lawful disposal to bequeath to whom I will.

“I do, therefore, give and bequeath to my wife, Catherine Bournlee, the house in which we dwelt while in

Glasgow, with the furniture and chattels thereunto belonging, for her abode and that of her two daughters, and therewith the annual income of four hundred pounds Scotch.

“To my daughter, Janet, I give and bequeath the sum of one thousand pounds Scotch.

“To my step-daughter, Helen Erskine, I bequeath the sum of five hundred pounds Scotch.

“To my friend and lawyer, Walter Johnstone, I give one hundred pounds Scotch.

“The bulk of my fortune, in the funds, my landed estates, houses in Edinburgh, and all else whatsoever of which I die possessed, save the legacies above mentioned, I leave to my nephew, Hugh Bolton, who, by my demise, becomes Laird of Bournlee, said bequest to be held and transmitted to his heirs in the entail. I do this, not in anywise through partiality or personal favor, he being a total stranger to me, but in fulfilment of the object for which I obtained this fortune, to wit: to constitute it an inalienable appanage to the lairdship in all future time,—the good report I have learned of him as my successor giving warrant of his worthiness for the trust.”

With a few minor legacies to his steward and favorite domestics appended, the document concluded.

When the advocate had ceased, not a sound was heard for a moment. Hugh was silent from astonishment, and the remainder of the audience forbearing to tender their congratulations to the fortunate heir in presence of the widow, thus so briefly cut off with scarce a competency, in the midst of such wealth. What were her sensations, whether resigned or indig-

nant, they were not permitted to judge. She instantly rose, and, followed by her daughters, passed through a side door, a slight inclination from each being the only sign made at their exit.

Hugh was at once the object of attention and felicitation upon the rich shower that had just descended upon him.

"I thank you, gentlemen," he replied; "but this strange, and most unjust will, is, to me, rather a cause of disturbance than gratulation. Is there no means of evading it for its due appropriation to the natural heirs, the wife and children of my late uncle?" inquired he of Mr. Johnstone.

His eyes distended with amazement at such a query, the lawyer stood too much confounded to reply immediately, then repeated,—

"Evade the will! surely not. The laird took good care of that possibility. Remember the words 'inalienable appanage, to have and to hold, etc.' You must e'en bear with fortitude the overwhelming fact of being, in your despite, *nolens volens*, the undoubted heir of a large, unincumbered fortune. We, of the legal profession, seldom have such questions propounded or witness such unwonted reluctance. I can only advise that you submit, with what grace you may, to the golden infliction," smiling as he concluded.

"To my mind, sir," said Hugh, gravely, "there is no absurdity in the idea of preferring to be just rather than rich. The entail is all to which I am entitled by the law of strict justice and rectitude. By the literal interpretation of the will, it seems that I am endowed with a heritage pertaining of right, and according to

their natural expectation, to the nearest relatives of the deceased, and one which I neither need nor desire."

"As simply the agent and executor of the will, I can only repeat that the bequest is inalienable as endowment of appanage to the entail, which is, of course, irrevocable," said the advocate.

"What if I refuse this bequest,—are not the natural heirs the next legatees; or if I bestow it on them gratuitously?"

"That can by no means be at your option," answered Mr. Johnstone, drawing a paper from his pocket. "Listen to a codicil of later date:

"If forfeiture occur in respect to the fortune bequeathed to my nephew, Hugh Bolton, through failure in the male line, by death, or any manner whatsoever, said bequest, as denoted in will of certain date, shall be instituted a fund for objects declared,' etc."

After a brief pause in the discussion, Hugh arose and said,—

"You will excuse my further attendance, gentlemen, for the present. I wish a few hours for reflection. You will remain, I hope, Mr. Johnstone, till to-morrow, by which time I shall be prepared to decide this vexed question."

A marvellous change, truly, had been wrought in the fortunes and future destiny of the young student of the Temple courts since the morning dawn. Wealth without stint, unsought, for which he had not toiled nor striven, at his feet for acceptance; riches springing up in a night like Aladdin's palace, ripe for his enjoyment. No further need for musty research, dry statute, precedent, and enactment. The fruits of a life's labor

were already garnered for him, and the long vista of time, now opening with early manhood, was unclouded by the working cares of a doubtful prosperity that furrow the brow and whiten the heads of the sons of men. It was a bright, a dazzling picture, and as the young Laird of Bournlee paced his luxurious apartment in busy thought, and, as he turned, the fair domain, redeemed by his predecessor from neglect and ruin, would meet his eye, the broad park, the undulating grounds and winding valleys in the distant view, the flocks and herds and abundant fields just gleaned of their harvests, his heart, perchance, was not wholly free from a transient pride and satisfaction at the conviction that, of all this, with the noble mansion in which he stood, he was undisputed master. He deliberated long and earnestly, and after calm and peaceful rest, on the morrow, solicited an interview with the widow of his uncle, the late laird, with whom he had not been in presence, save the few minutes during the reading of the will. The request was granted, and, at the hour appointed, the inheritor and the disinherited met for colloquy. The interview was in a private drawing-room of octagonal form, with three windows, permitting each an extensive and varying prospect of different parts of the grounds. From one could be seen the wide avenue winding upward from the lodge beneath arching trees of tall, though evidently not ancient growth, on either side of which, in gentle slope, rolled the park, quiet and untenanted but by the Highland roe-deer, of the branching antlers; from another, a garden of hardy plants, whose flowers had long mingled with the withered leaves soon to be

buffeted by the winter's wind, and a conservatory, with its gaud of exotics triumphing over the natives of the soil in its manufactured Italian air; and the third presenting a charming scene of greater extent,—a surface of hill and dale, with a meandering stream sparkling like silver globules in the sun's rays, spanned by an ornamental bridge of wirework, beyond, thick woods, and then, a dark mountain of fir and ash and larch rising like a wall guarding the landscape.

The room was of good dimensions, and richly furnished. It seemed the favorite sojourn of the family. There was a musical instrument, a book-case of select literature, chairs and sofas for easy repose, and birds of brilliant plumage from the far south hung around in gilded prisons.

It was not without embarrassment, as well as sympathy, that the new laird presented himself before the victims of a persistent ambition of which he was the innocent and unwilling executor, and he returned the formal bend of the head, made, half rising, at his entrance, with a silent bow, his usual calm self-possession nearly deserting him at so chilling a reception, amid circumstances so novel and perplexing. The widow retained little of the beauty that had charmed the fancy of the avaricious Highland laird, her appearance being simply mild and interesting. On a low seat beside her chair was her daughter, Janet, gathering scarlet berries from rowan branches for her birds, a rosy lassie of sixteen, with Scotch characteristics of golden hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. At some distance, as if uninterested in the interview, sat,



at a table strewn with autumn leaves, busily occupied, the inheritor of full five hundred pounds, Helen Erskine. Both rose, as their mother said, in low voice, "My daughters," and then resumed their seats and occupations. A large stag-hound, lying at Miss Erskine's feet, growled at the sight of Hugh; but with the command from his mistress—"Be quiet, Bruce," lay meek as a lamb, with his eye fixed menacingly on the intruder, as if aware that he had come to disinherit them all.

After brief silence, during which Hugh involuntarily directed his eye to the window next him, Mrs. Bournlee, observing it, with a faint tinge of pique and sarcasm in her tone, opened the conversation.

"The views from these windows, beautiful as they are, but imperfectly represent the fair inheritance that has just descended to you. It was a cherished plan of your predecessor so to construct the house, as to embrace, to the utmost extent possible, the different portions of the improved demesne from the windows; thus, from every room except the library, which has but one bow-window, new prospects give the continuous charm of novelty to the eye."

"Mamma," interrupted Janet, artlessly, "are there grounds attached to our house in Glasgow?"

"In front, Janet, the paved thoroughfare, with its noisy tread and stunning cries and wheels; at the back, a narrow court, dark, high walls and murky atmosphere! Oh, yes, we have ground, not grounds!"

As Hugh was about to take his part in the conversation, he was startled by a voice overhead, saying,—

"All going away, Helen?" and hastily looking up,

discovered in a starling the author of the query. Recovering, in a moment, from his surprise, he said,—

“The position in which the will of my late uncle places me, madam, is not less perplexing and painful to me than to yourself. At least, you will exonerate me from all voluntary participation in its injustice, and, I trust, suffer me to repair it, in some measure. Were it in my power, either by refusal to receive the bequest, or by any other means, to annul the will, I would not sully my conscience with a moment’s hesitancy.”

Not a breath stirred the stillness of the room at so unlooked-for a declaration, only the leaves on the distant table rustled, as if by a sudden wind. At length, evidently incredulous, and supposing the assertion mere verbiage under circumstances unalterably fixed, the unmeaning offering of pity that can afford a generous expression, with a deeper tinge of sarcasm in her tone, the widow rejoined,—

“Sir, I have heard the cruel and unrighteous decree read that consigns me from luxury and comfort to the narrow limits of an humble abode, with the scanty maintenance of four hundred pounds Scotch. I know there is no appeal, and your professions of compassion and theories of reparation where so manifestly excluded, are unseemly and bitter in their mockery. In a short space of time, we shall obediently fulfil this sentence of exile, and free your domains from the incumbrance of our presence. Ere a week elapse, we shall exchange these free and charming prospects for hated Glasgow.”

“Hate Glasgow, Helen!” again cried the starling.

Hugh was not a little surprised and disturbed by such unwonted doubts and imputations, but mastering the displeasure he might reasonably feel, remembering the natural cause for indignation there was on the part of the disinherited relatives, though misdirected in implicating him so erroneously, again endeavored to inspire confidence in his motives.



"Madam," he resumed, "I entreat you, suffer not the injustice, which I most freely accord to this will, to close your eyes and heart against my sincere and honest regret and purpose to remedy the injury it inflicts to the utmost of my ability. Why this incredulity and suspicion of hypocrisy in regard to me, the innocent usurper of your rights? Listen, at least, to the result of my deliberations on the subject, and endeavor to lay aside the prejudice that colors all my asseverations with doubt, and renders every effort of restitution abortive."

She assented with a bow, and Hugh proceeded,—

"Had you remained a few minutes longer in the library, you would have heard the discussion I evoked as to the feasibility of setting aside the document by a refusal to receive the bequest, or by bestowing it in free gift on the natural heirs. This is found wholly impracticable, not alone from the wording of the will itself, but the bequest is made irreversible by a codicil of later date, as if my uncle was indued with intuition of my scruples; the whole endowment, in fine, constituting a trust for the lairdship, or in event of failure in male descent, rendered transferable to designated objects. It is not my purpose to reside at Bournlee, certainly for the present, probably for years. I have adopted a profession, and shall pursue the study thereof till ac-

quired. I neither have nor desire riches, but am the possessor of a charming home in England, rendered dear and sacred as a heritage from my father, and now the dwelling of my honored mother. To this appertains a competency adequate to our wishes. What need I more for happiness, madam?"

She was silent, and he continued,—

"It is my intention to place Bournlee under proper guardianship, and carefully maintain its present high state of culture and prosperity, bestowing personal supervision by occasional visits. I pray you, madam, do not refuse me your aid in this perplexity, but consent to remain as its mistress, with authority not less real because delegated, and forbear to inflict on yourself and on me the pain of an expatriation so unwise and needless. Do not, for the sake of my young cousins, in the indulgence of a mere punctilio, risk the consequences such a violent transition might endanger. I am sure of an advocate besides you, in my cousin Janet," he added, observing the eager eye and parted lips of the little maiden, as she intently listened to his proposal to remain in the Highlands, where she had been wont to rival the deer in her fleet rambles over hill and dale. The rose on her cheek deepened its dye and her eyes drooped, while the mother's hand rested fondly on the bent head, and tears started at the thought of what a banishment from the health-inspiring breeze of the mountains to the narrow precincts of Glasgow might effect. So motionless had Helen Erskine been, during the discussion, that Hugh, in the excitement of effort to gain his point, had well-nigh for-

gotten her presence, when, in a calm, sweet voice, she said,—

“Mother, the laird is perhaps unaware that I am not of his blood and lineage.”

Hugh turned slightly to observe the speaker, when Bruce again growled as if to repel nearer approach to his mistress, and the starling, at the sound of her voice, fluttered in his cage and cried out,—

“All going away, Helen?”

“My daughter, Helen Erskine, is the child of my first marriage,” responded the widow.

“While regretting the denial of right to claim so fair a relative,” replied Hugh, gallantly, “yet as the adopted daughter of my uncle, the late laird, there can and, with Miss Erskine’s permission, shall be no difference in the earnest request for which I crave a favorable reception. I now leave you, madam, to the consideration of it till such time as you may select for decision. Free your mind, I beseech you, from prejudice in regard to myself or my proposal, and think of me as a relative and protector, anxious to soften the injustice that has wronged you, as a man, simply enacting the part of duty and honorable feeling.”

With more respect than at his entrance, Mrs. Bournlee rose as he was retiring, and said, in tones now free from sarcasm,—

“I appreciate your generosity, and thank you. Indulge me until to-morrow at the same hour.”

Hugh’s departure relieved Bruce from guard, and with a deep breath of content, he closed his weary eyes and slept in calm security.

“Oh, mamma!” exclaimed Janet, “how glad I am!

we are not to leave Bournlee, after all our grief at the thought of bidding it farewell forever. Dear Helen, are you not grateful to my cousin, the young laird, for such noble disinterestedness?"

"Gently! my child, gently!" interposed the widow. "I know not yet whether it consists with our respectability to be the pensioners of one who, however innocently, deprives us of our rights. What think you, Helen?" she inquired, as her eldest daughter advanced from the table.

"Of the perfect sincerity and truth of the laird in his proposition, mother," she replied, "I have no doubt. It is written on his candid brow like transparent light. Whether it is better for you, meanwhile, to conform at once to your fallen fortunes and prefer independence, though straitened, to patronage, is worthy of consideration. Consult our wise and excellent neighbor of the Linn, and abide by his judgment."

The advice was approved and acted upon, and in a short time Mr. Montrose, Laird of the Linn, their nearest and most trusted friend, was seen ambling up the avenue on a shaggy Highland pony, and entered warmly into the question presented.

The next day, Hugh was again ushered into the octagonal room. Only the two daughters were present, their mother, exhausted by the eventful excitements of the last few days, was unable to appear. After a few constrained remarks on indifferent topics, with apologies for Mrs. Bournlee's absence, Miss Erskine communicated her decision.

"My mother, sir, consents to abide here, in conformity with your generous invitation, for the space of

one year. Such a postponement of the evil hour," she added, smiling, "may, perchance, serve to habituate her to her fallen estate and avoid too abrupt a transition."

"In apprehension of immediate and final banishment," replied Hugh, his countenance expressing relief, "I must needs receive this respite with gratitude, and shall return to England, free from the grievous reflection of having dispossessed those whom I would fain preserve from the pain of arbitrary abandonment of a loved home. Let the future take care of itself, we will not indulge vain speculations concerning its hidden eventualities, but make the present our own, with its blessings and hopes. I learn from Mr. Johnstone, that certain formalities require my presence in Edinburgh, and we propose to set out to-day. When concluded, I shall return hither to organize affairs for my proposed absenteeism. May I not then rely on my young cousin Janet," he said, extending his hand to the blooming lassie, "as a guide to the wimpling burns and winding glens where the brownie and fairy dwell?"

"Oh, cousin," she replied, "if you tarry long in Edinbro', the snows will cover the glens and transform the burns into rushing floods. The fairy and brownie do not love the winter, and hie them away to other lands."

"In that case," said Hugh, laughing, "I must e'en borrow the wings of a zephyr, and hasten my return, to glean the final glories of the Highland autumn, so renowned for its genial beauty. And for you, Miss Erskine, since a title of kinship is forbidden," he added, turning to Helen, with marked respect, "may I not hope that these beautiful scenes, familiar from child-

hood, will lose none of their charms because of a reversion more nominal than positive? As the nearest relative and representative of your adopted father, I assume, by natural law (consent of parties thereto implied), the guardianship of his living survivors, as well as of the inanimate and perishable endowment which is but dross in comparison. You will not deny me this trust as presumptuous, because self-instituted?"

"The hospitable and most beneficent arrangement my mother has accepted from you, sir," replied Helen, with gentle dignity, "scarcely, even in its present modified limits, receives my unqualified assent, but is simply acquiesced in, as, perhaps, expedient in her present state, which is such as to render a hasty removal and contrast inadmissible. But this arrangement does not include me."

"Not include you!" repeated Hugh, amazed; "pray explain your meaning."

"Simply that I design to illustrate, in my own action, the counsel I should, under ordinary rules, have tendered my mother,—namely, to meet firmly and undauntedly the reverses of fortune, and conform thereto her future life. I did not thus counsel her, because of her frail, nervous temperament, liable to yield unresistingly to the shock of so sudden a change as the will prescribes; and, moreover, she follows, in this instance, the advice of a chosen friend and neighbor, for whose judgment she has profound respect. I can therefore only acquiesce where opposition would be fruitless and unwise; but for myself, with youth, health, and a stout heart, I could not be a pensioner,—no, not if a king were the patron!"



A responsive chord thrilled the frame of Hugh Bolton, as he heard the resolve so akin to his own nature, and he observed the speaker with more attention than he had previously awarded her.

The half-sisters presented a complete contrast in exterior. Helen was slightly above the medium height of her sex, slender, yet full in form, with hair of raven black, eyes of dark gray, and transparent complexion, though devoid of the damask hue that colored the cheek of her younger sister. Far from beautiful, still, so expressive was her face, so calmly intellectual, and, when animated, so earnest and dignified, that Hugh, as he scrutinized, wondered a being so striking in appearance had hitherto escaped his observation. As he remained silent, she resumed,—

“Doubtless, the late laird, in affording me extraordinary advantages of culture, exercised a wise foresight for which I owe his memory reverence and gratitude, as an endowment richer than the legacy that would have rendered exertion needless. These scenes are fair, and I love them well; but with the ever-present consciousness of having forfeited my self-respect, what were all their varied beauty to me?”

“But your mother, Miss Erskine; can you contemplate a separation that must cost her so dear?”

“My mother,” she said, “though unwilling, assents to my firm resolve, to which there can be no alternative. Nor would a removal to Glasgow have affected my purpose, though based on motives quite dissimilar. You will not think me ungrateful,—for, in truth, my heart is deeply penetrated with a sense of your goodness,—nor ungracious in declining to profit thereby.

Nay," she added, a smile illumining her features, "tell me not you deem my resolution the chimerical enterprise of a romantic girl. The truth and candor that beam from your brow assure me that my determination finds a sympathetic approval in your own breast."

To him who had turned aside from the polished etiquette and courtly ceremonial of a palatial embassy, the gorgeous art and ever-shifting panorama of the Eternal City, who, even now, waived the fruition of lettered ease, the freedom of will to indulge a proffered leisure in a luxurious retirement where both nature and the skill of man had combined to perfect the charm, because he would not forsake the path of duty,—because he considered life something more than a parterre of never-fading flowers to be plucked at will—an Eden without a tempter, whose fruits were pleasant and joys never-failing,—to him, there could be no repulsion of a principle so in unison with his own. After a short pause, he replied,—

"While impressed with admiration of the sentiments you have uttered, I would still fain guard you against precipitate action. If, as I surmise, your purpose be to seek the post of instructor, weigh well, I entreat, the difficulties attendant thereon ere you decide. There are many quicksands in such an embarkation. Are you prepared to brave the countless trials and sacrifices incident to such a career? Believe me, they will prove more formidable than your imagination has ever dreamed of. Why enter, so young, a path beset with thorns? You have formed a theory of independence, but in reality you will have no freedom but in your thoughts, and the busy memories of past happiness.

Will stern duty and self-denial compensate for the affections you are forsaking, or the cold accents of the stranger be to you as the loved voices of home and kindred? It is man's lot to go forth and breast the waves of time and tide, and to him is awarded a natural panoply for the struggle. For the tender, delicate woman, better to abide in port than encounter the dangers of the open sea, with its unknown currents and adverse winds."

"I cannot lift the curtain that veils the future," said Helen, deeply moved, though unshaken in her resolution, "but the path of present duty seems plainly outlined before me, and I must strive to follow it, though not knowing whither, giving results into His hands who will not leave my helpless bark without a pilot,—to the beneficent, omnipresent God. It is, after all, a beaten track, along which many a noble woman has trod,—wherefore should I shrink back appalled because it may be rugged and difficult?"

"Their experience, if written, might lessen the ranks of that goodly company," said Hugh. "But do not mistake me, Miss Erskine,—I hesitate not to believe the best definition of happiness to be *duty*, and I would by no means, where duly defined, obstruct the due exercise of its lofty teachings. Without regard to its monitions, there can be no peace, under its guidance, no real unhappiness. And yet, I cannot, without profound regret, yield to your resolution. It is painful to know myself the passive cause, though not the agent, of such removal from a kindly roof and the genial associations amid which you have lived and breathed."

Hugh's further remonstrance was here interrupted by Janet's voice, from the window looking upon the avenue, exclaiming,—

“Helen! Helen! here comes Mr. Montrose, of the Linn, on his Highland pony.”

A faint color tinged Miss Erskine's cheek as, rising, she said,—

“Then our argument, perforce, concludes.”

The next moment, the new guest entered, and was formally introduced to the young Laird of Bournlee. Mr. Montrose appeared about forty-five years of age, was of tall, stalwart frame, plain features, but expressive of intelligence and integrity. His manner was grave and reserved without haughtiness, and in bearing and conversation, the Laird of the Linn was not unworthy the long pedigree and large estate of which he was the inheritor. He was received by the sisters as a familiar friend and neighbor, while Hugh, who had not failed to notice the blush with which Helen heard the announcement of his arrival, was conscious of a novel sensation as he detected an increased depth in the tones of the stranger as he replied to her greeting. After a few desultory remarks, Hugh rose to take leave, prior to his departure for Edinburgh, partially accepting the invitation of its master to visit the Linn before returning to England.

“How is it,” inquired Mr. Montrose, when they were left alone, “that I find you unaccompanied by your canine guardian?”

“My poor Bruce!” she replied, tears filling her eyes, “I am trying to accustom him to the separation. You know I cannot well transport him with me in my wan-

derings,—unless, indeed,” she added, smiling, “I had a wand wherewith to metamorphose him into a benevolent lion, and my humble self into the Lady Una. And, moreover, Bruce seems preternaturally endowed with an inkling of the revolution the new laird’s appearance heralds, and he manifests, when in his presence, a ferocious longing to avenge our dispossession,—consequently, I, this morning, excluded him from the interview, in which I represented my mother, who is unable to appear.”

“And what says this young laird to your project?”

“In words he strenuously opposes, while at heart he approves it, I believe, as the natural dictate of duty and decorum.”

“To yourself, Helen,” replied Mr. Montrose, “young, buoyant, and in some degree sustained by the novelty and excitement of your own heroism, the sacrifice, perhaps, will scarce equal the grief your absence will impose upon those you have left behind. Have you pondered the pain such an abandonment will create? Can you bear to reflect on the void your departure must occasion?”

“Remember, laird,” she answered, dexterously evading the construction his voice and manner made too palpable, “I do not leave my mother alone; she will still have a daughter,—her best-loved and youngest,—as a solace and companion in her retirement.”

“Helen Erskine,” he rejoined, “know you not that from childhood you have been the joy and light of my life? I have watched with unwavering eye the unfolding of the bud into the flower, and have so garnered you into my heart that it will be truly the

taking of the poor man's little lamb if you forsake me in this darksome world. Helen, I am old in years beside you, and cold in exterior—not in affections. But it may be, for this disparity you will call me selfish if I bid you come and be to me an idolized wife, rather than go forth a friendless stranger, with no loving heart to support or comfort you in the dreary hours of an inevitable solitude. I ask not the passion you might accord to one more congenial in years and in taste,—give me, if you can, but the simple affection of your warm nature, and I shall be content with it as a rich blessing.”

“My kind and excellent friend,” said Helen, with extreme emotion, “the lofty tribute of your noble heart would be ill-requited by esteem, however exalted, or friendship even affectionate as mine. And yet it is the only return I could offer you,—the only sentiment I feel,—ardent, it is true, but unmingled with and distinct from that due to your worth and claims. Be to me, as always heretofore, the ever-ready counsellor, the partial friend, and banish the thought of another relation. Be still a father to my orphanhood, and let me regard you with the filial affection such association implies.”

“Come, then, Helen, as my daughter, the adopted child of my heart. From every ill man can ward off will I shield your young head, and with delicacy the most honorable, will I maintain the tie thus allowed me. Consider well, Helen Erskine, ere you refuse a shelter from the storms and trials I foresee in the lot you are choosing. Receive the paternal guardianship, into which I engage to merge a tenderer sentiment,

and follow the leadings of Providence, who thus opens wide a door for your homeless footsteps."

"Nay, my friend," replied Helen, tears, now unrestrained, on her cheek, "would you overwhelm me with your goodness? Believe me, it is not along such velvet by-ways as your indulgence would carve out for my feet, that my duty in the battle of life is to be fulfilled. Did I assent to such arrangement; your benevolent interest would, doubtless, survive, but would your esteem, more highly prized, retain its pristine vigor? And now, laird," she added, extending her hand, and smiling through her tears, "let us make a compact, binding us fast in friendship, and dismiss the consideration of all other prospective connection, for aye. As my chosen counsellor, you would, scarcely less than myself, shrink from the thought of my abiding here a twelvemonth, as the guest of the new heir, without even a community of blood to palliate its indecorum. And I pray you, dear Mr. Montrose, think not of me in my new career as a spoiled Sybarite, restive beneath the first crease of the rose-leaf, but as a youthful pioneer who has learned to regard life, not as one unbroken summer under a cloudless canopy, but as commingled light and shade dispensed by Him who careth for the sparrow as for the eagle in his eyrie."

## CHAPTER XIII.

"Edina! Scotia's darling seat,  
All hail thy palaces and towers!"

HUGH BOLTON recalled these lines of Burns, his mother's national pride had taught him in childhood, as he entered the Scottish capital, so renowned as successor of the elder Athens, the natal air of genius in every department, the sport of varied fortunes in wars of past ages, sitting amid the romance of nature, and inclosing within her boundaries the speaking monument of an extinct dynasty, old Holyrood of the Stewarts, the survivor of its princely founders, and still, with the proud fealty of love for a kingly line, opening wide her portals to fugitive crowns, though in poverty and exile.

When the formularies of his new accession did not demand attention, Hugh employed his leisure in seeking out the classic memorials in which Auld Reekie abounds, and which render her, probably, the most interesting city of northern Europe.

It awakens sad reflections as we contemplate mute stones standing as the durable cenotaphs of buried generations, defying alike the ravages of time and assaults of the stormy wind and tempest, while both founder and illustrator have long unresistingly surrendered to the puny worm, and resolved into their native dust. Such



were the passing thoughts of Hugh Bolton, as he threaded those winding, narrow highways, and gazed at the vacant shrines of intellectual greatness, more immortal than their possessors, and, as it were, mocking silently that ephemeral renown, whose wreath must quickly drop from the pallid brow of its frail creator.

In one of these peregrinations he was accosted by a familiar voice, and turned to greet a college friend, in Sir Ashleigh Harcourt.

"Ha! Bolton," said he, "who would have expected to meet you in Auld Reekie? Come to look after your inheritance, eh?"

"What! Sir Ashleigh; is it already spread abroad? How came you by the intelligence?"

"Oh, easily enough. A rich man, like the Laird of Bournlee, does not die with impunity. Men soon inquire into the course of the solid mementoes he leaves behind, and thus, your good fortune, which that incorrigible gossip, Madam Rumor, variously estimates, has been food for the winds in Edinburgh for twenty-four hours. I heartily congratulate you, old fellow. Blackstone may now rest undisturbed among the spiders. You, of course, bid farewell to jurisprudence and its dry tomes."

"By no means," replied Hugh; "my purpose is unaffected by this occurrence. To retire from active life into the solitude of the Highlands, however beautiful, and though, in some respects, such seclusion might gratify my taste, and thus expend the prime and flower of my days in luxurious ease without an object, and evading duties pertaining to my part in the world, comports not with my standard of right."

"The heroics with which Egmont used to charge you at Oriel strong as ever, I find," rejoined his friend.

"The maxims that actuate me are too homely to be ranked among such flights," said Hugh. "But tell me of Egmont, Sir Ashleigh, and Faulkner also. Are they the inseparable friends of yore?"

"Aye, one and indivisible."

"Faulkner is, no doubt, member for Knowlton?"

"Not so," replied the baronet, shrugging his shoulders. "He would, most likely, have been elected to the borough over all competitors, as representative of the old family, but that he voluntarily quitted the field, and the election went by default, to the infinite disgust of his constituents and the displeasure of his friends and supporters."

"What instigated him to such a withdrawal?" inquired Hugh.

"First," replied Sir Ashleigh, "his constitutional fickleness; then, a fastidious aversion to effort, needful to obtaining suffrages; lastly, love of pleasure and inability to resist temptation when presented in the shape of enjoyment. Faulkner possesses more than ordinary ability, is addicted to no glaring vice or pursuit unbecoming his rank in life, is a warm friend and charming companion, and yet; his unfortunate lack of stability and powerlessness against self-indulgence bid fair to obstruct excellence in all attainment profitable either to himself or others."

"Where is he now? You remember he was not only a college-mate, but my school-fellow for years, at the dear old rectory of Moreton, under Mr. Stepney's paternal instruction and wise counsel."

"He is probably hunting the chamois among the Bernese Alps with his chum, Egmont. Unable to deny himself the excitement of a tour upon the Continent, whither his friend was repairing for an antidote to disappointment in love, Faulkner relinquished a seat in Parliament, incurred the disapprobation of friends and electors, by suddenly announcing an intention of a protracted absence of a year, or perhaps two, in extended travel."

"Lord Egmont disappointed in love!" repeated Hugh. "Strange that such a star in the fashionable world could suffer repulse! Who was this romantic fair one?"

"His cousin, a beautiful Italian, of whom he was deeply enamored. She refused his suit definitively, and yet, whether in remorse for her cruelty, or pining for her wandering and disconsolate lover, certain it is, that her cheek has lost its bloom and her voice has a more sensible pathos as she sings the exquisite lays of her southern clime,—a change only noticeable within a few months."

"Are you sojourning long in this fair city, Sir Ashleigh?" inquired Hugh.

"No, I am off to-morrow for the moors, to shoot grouse, with some sporting gentry. Come along with us, Bolton, you must learn that august and humane science, now that the honors of a lairdship have been thrust upon you."

"Many thanks, Sir Ashleigh, but important, prior engagements forbid a present initiation, even under such auspicious guidance as yours. I must be back in London quickly as practicable."

"Ever the slave of the lamp, eh?" rejoined the baronet, and they parted to seek their separate devices, the one to his pleasure, the other to his duty.

The tardy conclusion of requisite formalities, procurement of a steward and other animated paraphernalia for the due care and preservation of Bournlee in his absence, delayed Hugh's return three weeks, and on his reappearance, he found the Highland autumn about to merge its mellow glories into the barrenness of winter, and the little family circle even smaller than at his departure. Helen Erskine, to his surprise, was not there, and Bournlee had lost its fairest ornament, a revelation that seemed to betoken the rapid approach of the dreary season, in the sudden, but not transient shadows of the before cloudless sky. The starling would ever and anon cry out, "All going away, Helen?" till Hugh felt inclined to mingle a tear with the large drops that the unconscious bird brought to Janet's blue eyes, and Bruce roamed mournfully up and down, unable to solve the mystery of his mistress's disappearance, with keen ear for every footstep and uttering a fitful whine, that the well-known tread, light though it were, he never mistook; still failed him.

The mother had wept at the separation from her noble, high-spirited daughter, and then, with wonted self-indulgence, quieted down into a peevish melancholy and repining at the injustice of her lot, while Janet's roses had not recovered their brilliancy, dimmed by the tears of parting. But youth is facile, and the sunshine quickly penetrates the light summer-cloud that chances to obscure its happy hours. Such a spring-time had long waned for the Laird of the Linn, and now

there seemed no more a sun within his horizon to dispel the gloom upon his furrowed brow. In his promised visit to the Linn, Hugh received abundant confirmation of suspicions, excited at the time of his introduction, of devotion on the one side,—but, what of the other? Aye! that he would like to know.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

“BEHOLD, Pengreaves, what spoils I have gathered in my perambulations!” said Hugh, one morning, holding up two billets to view. “Nothing less than an invitation to a masked ball at the Italian Embassy!”

“Py Saint David, that is coot!” responded the Welshman; “but seriously, man, prythee unravel. How didst thou, a doomed barrister, happen by such silken passports?”

“Through a chance encounter with one of the attachés whom I had known in Italy. After a warm greeting and exchange of queries and answers, he spake of this brilliant *bal masque* which he was anticipating with impatient ardor, and tendered me a passport, as you term it, to the expected carnival. I was not averse, but was especially prompted to accept by the thought of the pleasure such a novel scene would afford you. Accordingly, he hurried me into the embassy, near at hand, and leaving me a moment in his private cabinet, returned with these vouchers.”

Pengreaves embraced Hugh in his rapture at the

prospective enjoyment, and forthwith applied himself to the state of his wardrobe, for such a début in the great city of London.

Dazzling with light and noisy with the roll of carriages, cries of postillions and outriders, together with the curious crowd collected to witness the successive deposits of each envied arrival, was the street wherein stood the mansion of the Duca de L——, Ambassador from the Court of Turin to England, on the night of the masquerade that opened the London season. Within, the festal array was surpassingly attractive. Variegated lamps illumined the spacious suite with prismatic hues, hot-house and conservatory emptied their treasures to repel all thought of winter's reign, tall oleander gave freely of its perfume, Cape jasmine and pale stars from distant Catalonia, and the Queen of Italy's floral soil, the orange, bloomed in joyous sweetness, as if to wile the guests with dreams of the fragrant South. A few favorite gems from his palazzo at Turin hung on the walls, as companions to their master in his northern exile, a charming Aurora of Guido among the Friuli mountains, a vintage gay with picturesque costumes, a scene on Lake Como with its liquid sunshine and shade, the Falls of Terni, a Paul Veronese, and a fishing-scene of Horace Vernet. Countless niches and pedestals displayed busts of Dante, Alfieri, Leo X., with a mingling of philosophers, orators, painters, sculptors, from his own indigenous land of art. From trellised arbors came the music of sirens to perfect the illusion, and, amid it all, the guests moved softly, as if fearing to dissolve the charm. The lights were subdued till the banquet, when all would unmask, with the burst

of a full orchestra, glitter of jewels, and brilliancy out-vying the King of Day.

Groups of dominos succeeded each other, some in merry laughter, others in quiet rapture at the fairy scene, or bewildered by the mystery of some disguise they could not penetrate.

Voices were lowered or feigned, to avoid recognition, and there was a hum like the murmur of a distant stream.

Among the large number, one group consisting of five persons, excited peculiar attention and curiosity. A gentleman of stately gait, advanced in years, with two others of less mature age, were in attendance on two sylphs dressed with rare and distinguished richness. One wore lace of white Brussels above silver gray, as if to personate the Queen of Night; the other, the same delicate texture, black, over satin of gold color, that flashed like the sun. A mantle, confined at the throat, of web no modern loom had woven, partially concealed the white arm, sparkling with jewels like glimmering stars through a cloud of mist, and the dazzling stones on the neck of the fair *Incognita*.

Leaning against a pedestal, on which stood proudly a matchless Apollo, himself no unmeet personification of the ideal, was a gentleman in rapt contemplation of the conspicuous group slowly moving past him. His costume was not of the reigning mode. A mantle of scarlet fell from his shoulders, the attire being black satin. To a belt, were attached a short rapier and a stiletto, studded with diamonds. He followed with his eyes the group in question, while in sight, and then left his post, and mingled with the crowd, eager to as-

certain their identity. But, as if to elude the notice they attracted, the group suddenly vanished, and the Italian domino, after wandering in a perplexed maze awhile, seemed to abandon the vain pursuit, and to forget his curiosity, in the seraphic strains issuing from the invisible musicians. Drawing apart from the multitude, he found himself beside the two representative planets he had so long sought to discover, and so near, that, in his start of surprise, the point of his sheathed rapier, to his infinite embarrassment and chagrin, became entangled in the lace mantle of the golden mask, and was not without difficulty, at the risk of rending the frail web, extricated, and the fair prisoner released from its hold.

"*Perdonami, Signorina!*" he exclaimed.

"*La prego, Signore, non faccia ceremonie,*" answered a voice not less melodious than the notes from the arbor.

The Gordian knot was finally untied, and the stranger, with a salutation, "*felice notte,*" retreated, and was soon lost to view.

"An Italian," said one of the gentlemen.

"Doubtless, an attaché to the Embassy," rejoined another.

"I have not the faculty of remembering voices in an unfamiliar tongue," added the third, "but this is not altogether new to my ear."

Between two others, spectators of the scene at a short distance, the following colloquy ensued, *sotto voce*.

"Pen," said one, "I recognize not less than five voices in that circle."

"Pshaw!" was the reply, "your vivid imagination



continually peoples the air with sounds that never assume corporeal form."

"But, in this instance, I have found both a local habitation and a name for two, and I opine, also for a third."

"Two from the clouds and another still in the mist, eh? Interpret, I pray you."

"One is my friend and college-mate, Sir Ashleigh Harcourt, with whom I recently parted in the Land of Cakes; the other, Mr. Stanmore, an intimate associate, while at Rome with Mr. Stepney. He was then attached to the English Embassy. Of the others, in the elderly gentleman I recall the tones of a nobleman under my charge for an hour last winter."

"In charge! a nobleman!" repeated his companion. "A modern Proteus, by Saint David! Elucidate, most venerable guardian."

"An accident, in which I chanced to succor him, and which, he being alone for the time, required my attendance to his residence. It was then, as I was quitting the house, that the voice of the lady, whose mantle has just been released from the intrusive rapier, fell on my ear, in the hall. It was but an exclamation in Italian, and yet, for a few days, the music of it haunted me unceasingly."

"A romance growing up in a night and withering in the early rays! Another remains to be deciphered, most gallant of chevaliers."

"The Knight of the Rapier is the same we encountered in the Park, last autumn. My recollections of him are associated with a singular and tragic occurrence in Venice, where he was certainly a conspicuous

figure if not *particeps criminis*. His peculiar costume assists my memory, and confirms the identification. But hark! there is the signal for the banquet."

All was now brightness and splendor, as the guests, unmasking, sat around the rich board, laden with the rarest confections, fruits, ices, cordials, and every delicacy the most costly expenditure could command. Bright eyes vied in lustre with the diamond tiara, zone, or bracelet; no cloak of lace or silken gauze, then partially veiled; no color was lacking in the brilliant parterre; rose and violet, blue, crimson, and dazzling scarlet, golden sunbeam, and silver like the full moonlight, purple of royal dye, emerald, rivalling the leaf of early spring-tide, and virgin white, pure as the lily, was there in soft relief.

The nobles of the duca's retinue were distinguished by costumes, striking in contrast, differing, not alone from other nationalities, but from each other, and were assumed but for the night. Representatives from Turin, Tuscany, Rome, and Lombardy appeared in the full court-dress of their respective states. The entire scene composed a grand picture, glowing with the beauty of the animate as well as inanimate.

"I pledge you, Miss Courtney," said Mr. Stanmore, "in a cup of *bianco vino*, the nectar of your beautiful land."

"A century ago, Mr. Stanmore," she replied, "among enemies, you would have apprehensively observed the reception of the delicious draught in the Venetian goblet you hold in your hand. You know the property tradition ascribes to it, of detecting poison by instantaneous explosion."

"Aye, Miss Courtney," he answered, "there was, verily, in past times, beneath that surface of calm loveliness and Palladian grandeur, distinctive of your silent Venice, a stratum of deadly vengefulness and intriguing plots, that might have reputed it a fit abode for the 'Children of the Night.'"

"You will, at least, award her craftsmen the gift of ingenious device in the construction of so novel and effective an instrument of defence?" she asked.

"An irrefragable illustration of refined and skilful mechanism, as well for its transparent texture as for the magic property, which, perchance, may be rather the fiction of a romantic age than a reality. Now, however, this pellucid beverage, not even by a ripple, gives warning of a foe jealous of my present enviable fortune. I quaff it, therefore, to the fair Queen of the Adriatic, her peerless daughters and cunning craftsmen."

"Hear! hear!" said Sir Ashleigh Harcourt. "On my word, Stanmore, the House of Commons is become, it seems, a school of gallant compliment as well as forensic eloquence. Pray, my lord," he continued, turning to Lord Merindale, "in what part of that Arcadian region may Egmont and Faulkner be at this present writing?"

"At Verona, a fortnight since, exploring the topography of the rival houses of Montague and Capulet, and ere this, perhaps, at Naples, where, with a portion of the season at Rome, they propose to winter. But for Isabel's presentation at court we should have joined them there, and even yet, if my Italia's cheek does not recover its fulness, we may exchange the fogs

of London for the salubrious brightness of her own sunny clime, for which I suspect she is pining in secret."

The color that now mantled the cheek of the southern exile might, for a moment, have disproved the idea of delicacy as she responded, gravely smiling,—

"No, no, *Zio caro*, there is nothing in all Italy, or even Venice, half so dear to me as Isabel and yourself."

"I cry you mercy, my lord," said Sir Ashleigh, "the simple intimation of such a subtraction from the world of fashion causes the lights to wax dim in sympathy. What says the Lady Isabel to this projected withdrawal of stars from our hemisphere that will leave us in comparative darkness?"

"Astronomers of that ilk, you know, Sir Ashleigh," she replied, "never fail to discover new orbs appearing on the London horizon each ensuing winter, whose beams cast lesser lights into the shade of oblivion. From childhood, Italy has been to my imagination a kind of terrestrial Paradise, with bright and fragrant flowers beneath the feet, a sky of unfading blue overhead, perpetual music in the air, the very home of Art in its varied glories. I acknowledge, therefore, that such a transfer would be the realization of my favorite day-dream."

"Oh, for the carpet of the Arabian Nights!" said Mr. Stanmore, "provided, meanwhile, it be of adequate dimensions and solidity to whisk us all safely to Lady Isabel's Garden of Eden! Eh?" he suddenly added, "Harcourt, is it not Bolton I see yonder with that merry-looking Welshman beside him? By Jove, I

know these importations from North Wales by their phrenological cast."

"Even so," replied the baronet. "It is like the magical reflection of the mirror in that aforesaid tale of Arabian story, to behold such a staid disciple of legal archives and worm-eaten statute-books a participator in festive vanities of this kind. *En passant*, you have heard, of course, the news of his late accession?"

"Accession! not a word,—explain."

"An heir-loom that constitutes him a Highland laird, with an entailed domain and a rich endowment."

"Verily, a golden shower," said Mr. Stanmore. "And now, no doubt, one stimulus to exertion rendered nugatory, he consigns the study of law and its musty adjuncts to Hades, and yields to the seductive allurements of pleasure befitting his changed estate. Oh, yes, philosophers become like other mortals when the stone is discovered."

"His presence here, I confess, indicates such a revolution, though in a rencontre at Edinburgh during the autumn, he pronounced his purpose not at all affected by this unlooked-for wealth."

"*Nous avons changé tout cela.* Not the first instance of the heroics melting under the glittering rays of the golden eagle. Better so; philosophy in youth soon exhausts its strength, and the rebound opens many avenues to which novelty gives peculiar zest and attractiveness. There is, moreover, in the eye of that Ap or Pen by his side, a rollicking gleam conveying an evil communication, corrupting to the sobriety for which Bolton has hitherto been distinguished."

"A shade of prejudice, which you evidently have in regard to the Welsh, colors the young stranger's physiognomy, Stanmore," interposed Sir Ashleigh. "I see in him only a happy exhilaration in a scene which is, perhaps, to his unsophisticated eye, the enchanted Armida."

The earl's attention now excited by the colloquy, he directed his glass to the point of interest, and had no sooner beheld Hugh Bolton in bold relief beneath the glare of lights, then he exclaimed,—

"Lucia! Isabel! it is the hero of my unfortunate sprain,—the young gentleman I have so long and vainly sought. Who is he, Sir Ashleigh, do you say?"

After satisfying this inquiry, Lord Merindale was next eager to devise a mode of access to one to whom he considered himself an acknowledged debtor.

"At the conclusion of the banquet, my lord," said the baronet, "I will be master of ceremonies, and usher into this fair and honored presence my friend and college-mate, your young Samaritan."

## CHAPTER XV.

IN a boudoir of Merindale House, fitted up with the delicate, refined taste meet for the fair spirits that occupied it, were our two planets, the morning after the *bal masque*, at which they had been the cynosure of all beholders. On a lounge reclined the Lady Isabel, in *demi-toilette*, her blue eyes, like half-open violets beneath their dark fringe, wearing the dreamy expression of one still amid the visions of the night. The rose on her cheek was somewhat paler, for this was her first season, and she was not yet inured to the discipline of fashionable custom that changes the order of nature in its evolutions of day and night.

Not so passive or languid was her Italian cousin, the brilliant Lucia, whom, on the preceding night, we have seen flashing golden rays on all around. She was plunged in a low, deep fauteuil, attired in a flowing silk negligé, her dark hair unbound in luxuriant masses about her neck. Her eyes wore not the half-asleep abstractedness of the young English neophyte, but were unclosed and lustrous, as if fully awake to all the effulgence of the mid-day, while never, even before the hot-house of artificial life had robbed her cheek of its virginal freshness, did it exhibit so bright a bloom. Evidently her thoughts were busy and pregnant with strong feeling, and now and then, restlessly moving forward in the capacious chair wherein she was partially buried, they would embody themselves into ex-

cited, impetuous words, or, as if in uncontrollable intensity of expectation, she would turn to the little ornamental clock on the mantel, whose hours lagged too heavily for her impatient wishes.

"I tell you, Isabel," she said, "that on the next few hours hang the issues of my future life, for weal or woe. The young stranger who to-day dines with us *en famille*, holds the secret spring that unlocks the mystery which has for months tortured my heart with its doubt and suspense, and I feel as if a sword were suspended above my head, that, like the avalanche of the Alps, a breath would dislodge."

"My dear cousin," replied Lady Isabel, in soothing tones of remonstrance, "this fever of excitement alarms me. If so affected by the bare anticipation, how will you meet the solution of your doubts, be it as you fear or as you hope? Moreover, how can you contrive the introduction of such a topic? Consider, this Mr. Bolton is our guest for the first time, and, in the limited circle present to-day, there will scarcely be opportunity to solve this riddle, unless by some device at the expense of decorum and propriety, wholly averse to your ideas of dignity and the rules of ordinary etiquette."

"You must aid me, *cugina mia*," she replied. "A like occasion may not offer, and I must avail myself of this to allay my suspicions or decide my action. In a few days the period affixed by my father expires, and then—then, perchance, I shall be summoned to meet him face to face. And with this spectral doubt still haunting my soul! Think of it, Isabel,—think of it and pity me."



To the English maiden, timid in her inexperience, and wont to veil her emotions under the mantle of reserve, this tumult of impassioned feeling was well-nigh inconceivable. The young Venetian, as if responding to her look of wondering perplexity, rejoined,—

“I well know, sweet Isabel, that to your temperament, which, loving though it be, is still placid as a summer lake while yet unruffled by the storm which, sooner or later, sweeps across the path of every woman in fulfilment of her destiny, the ardent impetuosity of my southern nature seems a wild, uncurbed torrent. Bear with me, cousin; you are the sole depository of my heart's inmost agitations. To the world, the domino of last night is not more actual than is the mask I daily assume to mock its penetration.”

“It is inexplicable to my comprehension, I confess, Lucia,—this absorption of every thought and emotion. So young on leaving Venice, your affections were assuredly too immature for an inextricable entanglement. And the mere bonds of betrothal may doubtless be dissolved by your dissent. My father would never permit an enforced consummation, to the detriment of your peace and happiness.”

“Listen, *cugina mia*, listen to a brief history of my Venetian girlhood, brief indeed, if reckoned by its birth-days, but in interest and importance to me, fruitful as a patriarchal lifetime. My father, as you know, by no means contemplated entire expatriation from his native England at his marriage with an Italian lady, nor was it until after more than one test of her constitution to a climate so diverse from her own, that he reluctantly yielded to the evidence of fatal effect if the

experiment were persisted in, and determined on a residence in Italy, which his moderate fortunes as a younger son required should be secluded and unpretending. My earliest recollections are associated with a modest villa on the Brenta, not far from Venice, with its willows drooping to the flowery earth, a small lake at the back, and its flaunting little bark moored in the shade ; in front, the blue waves and many-colored sails. My mother's hereditary palace in Venice could not boast the frowning magnificence that distinguished the architectural grandeur of Palladio, but, nevertheless, with its rambling corridors, hollow-sounding halls, and tapestried chambers, betokened past greatness, and afforded a spacious and comfortable habitation for a winter's sojourn. A pretty chalet in the cool recesses of the Friuli mountains was our retreat from the summer's heat and malaria. These transitions with returning seasons, gave new life to my frail and languid mother, but, alas ! there is reason to fear, were not efficacious to avert disease from my father, whose frame evinced increasing enervation under an atmosphere devoid of the bracing gales of his northern home. On the shores of the Brenta where we dwelt side by side, in the old marble palace at Venice, or climbing the picturesque summits of Friuli, Stefano, but two years my senior, was my guide, my companion, inseparable, ever-chosen. On the lake, its quiet surface seldom disturbed by a ripple to affright us, as steersman in gay cap and black feather waving to the breeze, mingled with dark locks of a like raven hue, to my young eyes, a model of grace and symmetry ; or seated beneath an arbor watching the idle sails along the Brenta, or

shaded by the willow, plaiting cages of the slender wands for a chance bird astray from distant haunts, or weaving a collar of flowers for my greyhound; in Venice enacting tableaux devised from the voluptuous beauties of Titian, or the grim portrait of some Venetian grandee of the time of her doges which hung in sumptuous array in the long picture-gallery of his father's palace; or listening, delighted, to the gondolier as he sang the lament of Tasso in his captivity while gliding over the Adriatic Sea; or roaming, for unheeded hours, through the clefts or along the summits of Friuli, emulating the chamois browsing on the inaccessible cliffs above us, lingering till the Angelus from some far-off convent-tower should toll for mid-day, or till sunset should call forth the Ave Maria from a village church below, there was still Stefano by my side. Our instructors were the same, excepting only the abstruse studies befitting his sex. Together, we admired the majestic vigor of Dante or loved the mellifluous verses of Petrarca; together, we read, with proud interest, of old Venetian glory when she sat a queen upon the waters, and wept for her decay and submission to the usurper. My father was his tutor in English, and opened to his understanding the genius of Shakspeare, of Chaucer, and of Milton. With the harp and Venetian lute we sang the soft melodies of Petrarca to his Laura, and the impassioned canzonette awoke no unholy emotion to sully our innocence. The betrothal beside my father's death-bed was solemn, but found no dissent in our young hearts. Isabel, in that land of the sun, where nature develops her beauty in fond luxuriance, where art springs forth as if in rivalry of that perfect

nature, amid the inspired music of song in a language seemingly the chosen vehicle of love, woman earlier learns its impassioned teachings than in the frigid conventionalities of a region where it unfolds slowly to the sunlight, like the rose-bud wrapping itself closely in its mossy armor till tempted to expand by the warm touch of summer. At sixteen, the love that had grown with my strength was entire and absorbing, and the wail of sorrow that, for months after reaching England, refused to be comforted, was not wholly the requiem above my mother's tomb, separation from the living mingled deeply in its inconsolable lament.

"Since, I have lived on the memories of the past, without a cloud to shadow the happy future till the fatal hour of that dark, strange narrative repeated by Mr. Stanmore, at Knowlton. From that day, a blight has mildewed my peace with its doubt and suspicion, and my soul has been rent by alternate hopes and fears. I must end this torturing suspense, Isabel, I must end it, and to-day."

It was with all the sympathy of her refined sensibility that her companion listened as the young Italian recounted her early life in the glowing imagery of a land, constituting in itself one vast canvas of ardent beauty. This, however, was not unmingled with astonishment as she heard such burning words expressive of a passion of whose existence she, herself, was scarcely conscious.

The dressing bell summoned them to their toilette, and they separated to prepare for the momentous hour, now at hand, fraught with the destinies of two beings of mortal mould.

## CHAPTER XVI.

NEVER, as on this day she had pronounced eventful in its revelations, had Lucia Courtney looked so brilliant. Her dress of rich crimson served to enhance the unwonted color on her cheek and the sparkling light of her dark eyes, while her hair of Madonna hue, partly knotted at the back of her head, left one or more stray ringlets as a contrast to the white neck on which they rested. Lady Isabel, in her own serene loveliness, was well-nigh dazzled by the gorgeous beauty of her Venetian cousin, though at no loss to decipher the secret of the excitement that had so heightened its charms.

The circle consisted only of Hugh Bolton and Mr. Stanmore, the former Miss Courtney's *vis-à-vis*, and, as may be surmised, presented an object to her eye of both hope and dread. The earl led his new guest to discourse of his late Highland acquisition, heard with surprise of his resolution to hold in abeyance a personal residence there to the consummation of the legal course he had allotted himself, and then, turned the conversation to parliamentary debates, at that time of special interest, as involving great public questions and probably the issues of peace or war.

On all these topics, Lord Merindale listened with surprise to the clear, logical opinions and candid judgment displayed by the young barrister, evincing thought and study, and uttered with such modest self-

possession. The Hon. member of the House was not ordinarily indifferent to discussions, especially within the scope of his daily personal cognizance, but, on the present occasion, willingly yielded his part in the colloquy for the pleasing duty of gallant devotion to the fair cousins before him.

Lucia began to despair of the opportunity, so earnestly coveted and anticipated, of penetrating the mystery that haunted her like a spectre, as the wines heralded the end of the social meal. Her uncle, unconscious of the nervous impatience his political discourse evoked, and supposing his new acquaintance the object of attraction to himself rather than others, scarcely relaxed its continuance till etiquette prescribed the withdrawal of the ladies, and Lucia had no option but the chance of better success at their reunion in the drawing-room.

As is oftentimes exemplified, prelude and arrangement were obviated by an unexpected *éclaircissement*. The noble lord of the mansion having fully elaborated the intricacies of State policy, subsided into a luxurious chair inviting a siesta, leaving the *partie carrée* to the unrestricted reminiscences of the masquerade, whose glittering attractions were still fresh in their mental vision.

"A novel but charming expedient of our munificent entertainer," said Mr. Stanmore; "this retinue, as we may call it, of favorite gems of art he transports with him, as if, like his children, he could not bear a prolonged absence from them."

"Though all, I believe, the works of great Italian masters, except the fishing-scene of Vernet," responded

Hugh, "none so much delighted my eye as the sunrise on the Friuli mountains. You, no doubt, remember, Mr. Stanmore, the enchanting view they presented as we were quitting Venice."

"Aye, my good fellow," he replied, "your extasies are still ringing in my ear. But, the romantic scene was not wholly new to me; their due impression, at first, meanwhile, obscured by the circumstances of the extraordinary mission on which I was wending my way as plenipo of your highness. By-the-by, Hugh, last spring, at Knowlton, I recited to the touching admiration of an élite company, of which two of the fairest are now present, that remarkable episode in Venice, wherein you were hero. Never fear, I borrowed not a solitary *panache* to deck my own modest brow, but simply acted as poet-laureate with an ode in your praise."

An attentive ear might have heard the beating of a heart within that little circle, but Lady Isabel alone discerned the varying hue of the cheek and the quick heaving of the bosom as Mr. Stanmore continued,—

"Certainly, the most romantic adventure in which I ever had the felicity to be engaged. Fancy me, a literal John Bull, profoundly inexperienced in that mortal infirmity, ycleped *love*, the nearest approximation being the sublime, stereotyped hypocrisy of an electioneering round among the wives and cherubs of an enlightened constituency, to the infinite damage of my moustache and ruffled sark; fancy me, I say, if you can, ambassador to a faithless lover, a stranger in person and language, commissioned to escort said recreant, *nolens volens*, to a certain designated spot. Miss Courtney," he

proceeded, turning to the agitated Lucia; "if my memory be not at fault now, as then, when you honored my story with such condescending interest, you were curious to learn the patronymic of this young noble of the Brenta, whose part in the drama was at best so equivocal?"

No sound issued from the compressed lips, and her very heart seemed to stand still as she merely inclined her head in assent.

"Bolton," he rejoined, "you have not forgotten the title of this young Lothario with the scarlet cloak, whom I obediently brought before your worship on that memorable occasion? Conte Stefano was the sole portion my English catalogue retains."

After a short interval of thought, eternal in duration to the tortured Lucia, Hugh answered,—

"The time that has elapsed and the illness succeeding the occurrence have erased it from my mind also. But, of one thing I am confident, this Venetian noble of the scarlet cloak is now in England. I recognized his voice at the Embassy last night, and he it was whose rapier became entangled in Miss Courtney's mantle."

"Ha!" said Mr. Stanmore, "the Knight of the Rapier! Doubtless, in the duca's suite. On my ear, too, unpractised in Italian, his voice fell as a familiar tone. He vanished like an apparition. Did you see him without his domino?"

"No," replied Hugh; "nor should I, probably, have remembered the features, scarcely visible to me in the dim light of that Rembrandt scene. But the voice is one not to be forgotten."



"So, Miss Courtney," resumed the member of the House, "we are still in the mist as to the title of your fellow-countryman. However, we shall, of course, encounter this gallant unknown among the duca's train of followers, and then—Are you ill, Miss Courtney?"

Lady Isabel, now thoroughly alarmed at the pallor of her suffering cousin, resorted to the experiment of a costly sacrifice to create a diversion. Rising with the words, "the heat of the room," she dexterously contrived to throw upon the floor a Chinese toy of exquisite workmanship and of great value as a curiosity. The crash aroused Lord Merindale, who started up, saying,—

"What! the Venetian goblet!" awaking from a vision of magic transparency and stealthy white powder at the bottom of the poisoned chalice.

The device was successful. Lucia was saved from a swoon by the untoward accident as the earl styled it, and in the stir glided from the room, unable, longer, to conceal the intensity of her emotions, hastily followed by Isabel, under the plea of ministering to her sudden indisposition.

"My dear Lucia," she said, when possible to stem the tide of her despairing grief by a word of consolation, "this recognition of the voice inspires me with hope. How, if not familiar to your ear, could it be the person you apprehend?"

"Remember, Isabel, the three years that have elapsed,—manhood changes the tones of youth. And, moreover, how could I imagine him in England, unknown to me? And why is this? Oh, it is he be-

yond a doubt! Alas, suspense was blissful compared to this confirmation of my fears!"

"And, if even so," pursued the sympathizing Isabel, it is not irrefragable evidence of guilt. Await the solution from himself."

"Ah, my cousin," she replied, "there is fearful meaning in that suicide, and—in his own tokens of sorrow. Oh, no, I cannot behold him more,—the trial would kill me!"

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## CHAPTER XVII.

FROM courtly London, its pomp of circumstance, its fêtes and banquet-halls, we again turn to her northern sister, the calm and classic Edinburgh.

From the impassioned tumult of a heart stricken to its depths by the arrow of suspected wrong, we seek the relief of a quiet, placid soul, humble in its heroism, steadfast in its duty.

At Merindale House, there was grandeur—wealth and magnificence barred the way to carking care, and the sturdy pedestrian, passing by to life's homely toil, deemed it the secure abode of ever-returning pleasures, unmixed with pain. But despair and wild sorrow had mastered the defences, and little recked the surging, envious crowd of the storm within the lordly mansion, to their imagination the very home of cloudless sunshine.

Helen Erskine had bidden adieu to Bournlee, its

rolling mists, its braes and heather banks. In place of the free air and boundless horizon of the Highlands, she inhabited a small chamber in a crowded thoroughfare; for the song of birds and the whispering winds she had exchanged the hum of recitation and noisy hilarity of appointed recess,—the unchecked control of every hour, the freedom of a ramble with faithful Bruce, the variation of a favorite author with the music of her harp, she had bartered for the shackles of a daily routine of compulsory occupations. In the seminary she had left a year previous, the adopted daughter and presumptive co-heiress of a rich laird, she now ranks a teacher, without expectations and in all the realization of self-dependence and self-reliance. She was young, and not free from mortal infirmities, therefore, if sometimes at twilight her thoughts would revert to the fair home of her girlhood, and she pined, amid those alien to her blood, for the voice of kindred, for the soft touch of Janet's golden curls ere she sought her tranquil slumbers, or longed to hear her mother's tones invoking God's benediction for the night, it was natural but not morbid. She knew her decision to be right and alone consistent with duty and dignity.

If, in solitary hours, the picture of the free and happy past became too vivid for her peace, she would reverse the canvas, and imagine herself the recipient of bounty, humiliating, however gracefully imposed, a dependent and ignoble, though disinterested the benefaction, and a calm content would possess her soul, the satisfaction of a good conscience, and no regret would contract the candid brow, or darken it with a cloud. Her cheek had lost some of its freshness and her form

a little of its round proportions, but there was still the same modest courage in her expressive eye, the same fearless composure in her mien that had always given her carriage a kind of stately grace not unworthy the highest rank. Warm in her affections, decided and enthusiastic in her tastes, yet these were not the ordinary tastes of her sex and age. She was rather grave than vivacious, preferred retirement to the pomp and ostentation of cities, revelled in congenial intercourse, was a passionate lover of nature, and thought it not solitude with only the companionship of her books. Her fine intellect welcomed graciously the opportunities of culture, provided without stint, and brought forth in return a harvest of fruit pleasant to the taste in prosperity, a succor and refreshment in the day of adversity. The casual observer little imagined the stores of high resolve and ardent feeling that dwelt beneath that quiet self-control, or recognized in the lofty port of the young instructress, that repelled undue familiarity and presumption, the simple dignity of a mind and heart superior to the levity and frivolity that found no echo within her. We must not deny that her principle of independence was not wholly untinged with the pride that cannot brook obligation, save from a recognized source, and this natural infirmity had received an accession rather than diminution by her changed estate. Among the more sordid who had known her, when the path of life bid fair to be one long promenade through pleasant meads over which no rude winds from heaven should blow, there arose surprise that she should exhibit, in her fallen fortunes, the proud bearing they had thought but seemly and becoming in the co-heiress of

the rich Highland laird. Thus is the value of adventitious advantages reckoned, in narrow minds, a virtue and a prerogative, though, as we have seen, likely at any moment to be annulled by a dominant caprice,—and at best, without more stable foundation than the house built upon the shifting sands.

The winter had given place to spring, and now the young summer was waxing bright and strong as Helen Erskine again stands within the halls of Bournlee. Janet's report of her mother's state alone had overcome her determination to revisit it no more, but so alarming was this report, added to that of the Laird of the Linn, as to leave no option even for reflection. Nor were their apprehensions groundless. Her pale, attenuated appearance attested to Helen the ravage of the last few months. Mrs. Bournlee was the victim of morbid, unceasing discontent with her appointed lot. Brooding continually over the injustice that enforced a separation from her daughter and banishment from her present luxurious abode to the narrow limits of a hut, as she styled the house in Glasgow, a place to which she entertained a rooted aversion from the misfortunes of her earlier life there, had eaten like a canker, and as the period drew near of practical realization of such a reverse, despondency reigned supreme, to the exclusion of peace and happiness, till her very life seemed rapidly consuming beneath the anticipation.

They are once more assembled in the family drawing-room, where, the autumn previous, the decisive colloquies occurred, related on a former page, the mother on a couch propped by soft cushions she had once called her own, Janet, as before, at her side, rather

more developed since we last described her, not less golden her luxuriant curls, nor her cheek less blooming; but in her blue eyes an unwonted shade of pensiveness. The joyous lassie had neglected her burns, and her rambles among the broom and heather, to listen, patiently and sympathizingly, to the repinings of her invalid mother. Helen, seated beside the couch, one hand caressing that young, innocent head, the other clasped in the slender fingers of the frail form before her, looked not unlike a guardian angel keeping watch and ward over those helpless objects of her love. It needed no prophetic eye to foresee the severance not far distant, and there was added to the grief of her own orphanhood, a pitying sorrow for the tender bud soon to be deprived of the parent stem to which it was even yet clinging with such blind, fond tenacity. At her feet lay the happy Bruce, at times expressing his joy by a low bark, and watching her every movement with jealous vigilance, as if fearing she might again vanish from his sight; the starling fluttered in his cage at the sound of the familiar voice, and the heavy branches of the trees waved a flickering light on the carpet like bright bubbles over its many colors, and far adown the sloping park, the roebuck of the Highlands sought wearily the cooling shade till the last glories of the June sun should gild the tops of the western mountains. All nature seemed relaxed, and there was no sound amid its deep stillness save those that float upon the air, the voices of its invisible Ariels peculiar to a summer noon.

"Helen," said the invalid of the couch, "these scenes were never half so fair to me as now, when the

period of my probation draws nigh. I shall never survive the banishment, never. Must we go, Helen?"

"Go, Helen?" repeated the starling.

What a question was this to the candid, upright girl who would have died rather than forfeit her self-respect, unable to comprehend hesitation between independent obscurity and the patronage of a stranger to blood and lineage, who had reluctantly consented to, rather than approved, the decision of a postponed removal, inevitable and not less onerous by the delay,—what a question for her, from pallid lips eager for an indulgent reprieve, and dreading nothing so much as a sentence of exile!

"My dear mother," she replied, "we will not now dwell upon such contingencies. Be of good cheer, and leave the future to Him, who alone can fathom its hidden possibilities."

"But if ill, Helen, if ill, you would not impose such a trial upon me in my present state?"

To this there could be but one answer, and Helen gave it.

"No, mother, no; you could not support it, and such cruel precipitation is not needed."

This soothing promise, like a respite, comforted the feeble sufferer; and, after a composing draught, she reposed in delusive dreams of an unaltered future.

Helen softly left her post, to gratify her longing to visit once more the haunts of past happiness.

At the back of the house, and about half a mile distant, there was a little dell overhung by a clustering group of the mountain-ash, composing a natural arbor, thickly shaded, and affording a view of wild, rural

beauty. Below, a mountain rill trickled musically through the grass, whose crystal waters had scarce depth enough to tempt the thirsty fawn, while the cultivated grounds on the one side, and the diversified valleys and wooded knolls and the mountain-ridge beyond, made the prospect charming indeed to the eye of the beholder. It had been Helen's favorite resort from childhood, and in her lone room at Edinburgh, the image memory would recall of her green arbor never failed to produce a tear of regret and an uncontrollable sadness within her heart.

The late laird, who gave as much affection to his step-daughter as consisted with the primary aim of his thoughts and desires, had furnished the little retreat with pretty rustic seats and an inlaid floor of pebbles, and called it "Helen's Arbor." It was associated in her mind with many of her happiest hours, where, with only Bruce as living companion, amid the retired quietude so congenial to her, she had enjoyed the rich pleasures of literature and picturesque scenery. Her faithful devotee, bounding onward in the exuberance of his delight, entered first their well-remembered haunt, and then, barking loudly, returned to his mistress bearing something in his mouth which he deposited at her feet. To Helen's unspeakable astonishment, it was a man's glove. So sudden was the surprise that she did not recoil in alarm, but involuntarily proceeded in order to ascertain its owner. On the floor a book met her eye, doubtless cast down by the excited Bruce on discovering the invasion of his mistress's domain. Who could its owner be? Not Mr. Montrose of the Linn. It was of foreign texture and



not of his dimensions. She raised the book from the earth. It was "Sismondi's Italian Republics." The mystery thickened. She resolved to retrace her steps and seek the solution. Meanwhile, Bruce, preferring to unravel it on the spot, sought persistently, till at length, springing forward with a joyful recognition, he appeared, ushering the young laird, our barrister, whom we so recently left in London the apparent depositary of a momentous secret involving the peace and happiness of two individuals. He was ascending the path from the little dell, in one hand a bunch of wild flowers and plants, in the other, a bird, whose trailing wing tinged with blood indicated its wounded state. He advanced toward Helen, saying,—

"I trust, Miss Erskine, you have not been repelled by the tokens of intrusion into the arbor which is yours by privilege of foundation and appellation."

"You remember the Spanish proverb," she replied, "'What once was and is not, is as if it had never been.' And I need not remind one learned in the law that a title, especially a buried one, assumes not competition with the other nine points of possession. But, laird, I was not aware of your presence in the Highlands."

"Indeed!" said he, "had I needed evidence of Miss Erskine's, the dereliction of my four-footed companion would have taught me the return of his mistress. Bruce has discovered that I am not an ogre, as he supposed, but a very harmless lover of his species, and he it was, Miss Erskine, that guided me to this beautiful retreat you have honored with your name. But," he added, "I must not forget my poor little nursling,

an ill-fated lark, which I rescued from the fangs of a huge vulture. My hat," he said laughing, "was the weapon of deliverance, the dark bulk coming unawares athwart his triumphal flight, so disconcerted the destroyer that he released his grasp, and the poor lark fell to the earth. It bears, however, the marks of his cruel talons. What shall I do with it, Miss Erskine?"

Who does not love this charming portion of God's creation, the innocent birds, with their varied plumage, songs of praise to Him for His goodness, their joy of instinctive confidence in that gracious protection which suffereth not the least of them to fall unnoticed?

It was a passion with Helen, and their notes were her sweetest music. Accordingly, with the tenderest interest, she staunched the wound of the rescued lark with a soft leaf, Hugh holding the other fluttering wing, and then requested the charge of it till healed.

"Be still, little trembler!" she said pityingly; "ere long you shall again soar joyously to greet the morning dawn. Have you ever," addressing Hugh, "listened to the lark's early carol, uprising, and with each ascent singing with invigorated cheer? I have often," she continued, "risen before the mists of night had vanished, to hear the inspiring note."

"Remember, Miss Erskine," he replied, "I am country-bred. Our home of the Manor has not extensive grounds, but the estate is partly wooded and the habitation of many a sweet singer. No hostile foot enters their privileged domain. Your Scotch lark is not so large as ours of England, nor his note so powerful in its ringing sound. But our pride, Miss Erskine,

is the nightingale,—that I have not heard or seen in the Highlands.”

“No, I fear our climate is too repulsive for this troubadour that celebrates the beauty of his mistress, the moon, in such witching strains, amid the repose of nature, and then hies away to the rose, his sultana by day, ere the sun rises to eclipse his lady-love.”

“You remember the words of Coleridge,” he replied,—

“On moonlit bushes,  
Whose dewy leaflets are but half disclosed,  
You may, perchance, behold them in the twigs,  
While many a glow-worm in the shade  
Lights up his love-torch.”

In the interest of the discussion and sympathy with the wounded bird, Helen well-nigh forgot the passing moments, and hastily turning to regain the house, Hugh also proceeded by her side. She asked him of the spoils he held in his hand.

“I gathered them,” he responded, “in the little dell. Are you fond of botany, Miss Erskine?”

“Extremely,” was her answer.

“My natural love of flowers and plants,” he said, “was cultivated by my revered preceptors of Moreton. I must tell you, some day, Miss Erskine, of the old rectory. It contains one of the finest herbals in all England. I confess, however, more of love for the study than for the botanical nomenclature, mingled somewhat in my brain, with *nisi prius*, etc. I found, in the dell, some pretty specimens, quite new to me, for whose names and properties I shall appeal to you for elucidation. They are doubtless indigenous only

to the Highlands, like many other charming things I have seen here for the first time—such as you, Bruce, eh?" he added, vainly striving to coax a caress. Not so, Bruce had neither eyes nor nose for others than his mistress.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

TIME sped onward, and with each day fell the waning sands of the former mistress of Bournlee. With tender firmness, Helen gradually enlightened her as to her real state and the probable event now rapidly approaching. After the first tremor of awe at such a revelation, her entire concern for the future of this life centred in the thought of her daughters, thus orphaned and alone in the world, with scarce a competency, as she reckoned it, for due maintenance. The knowledge of Helen's superior mind and judgment was a hopeful warrant for her own lot, and a ground of confidence for the young and timid Janet.

Hugh Bolton had come to the Highlands in conformity with his plan of partial residence and oversight. He remained, on learning the crisis of affairs, to lend his succor and protection in the hour of trial he saw at hand. Week after week rolled by, and he identified himself to the utmost with those he yearned to shield from every ill, by the most delicate, winning devotion, entreating them to regard him in no other light than as a near relative, deeply interested in their happiness

or sorrow. With the restless desire of change peculiar to pulmonary disease, the invalid was still daily borne to the favorite apartment, and there would Hugh unite with Helen to cheer her by exerting his powers of research and memory. These were sad but precious hours, never forgotten by either, and of imperishable fruit.

Helen Erskine's dignity and self-reliance had from the first attracted Hugh's admiration and esteem, and even in presence of the more brilliant Lucia, he would recall the Highland maiden, so brave and resolute amid difficulties, so steadfast in the line of duty, and the image would be as the soft green to the dazzled eye. What was the natural result of this intimate continuous intercourse? Hugh Bolton loved Helen with his heart of hearts, and revelled as in an enchanted land while the communion existed. Did she know it? Who could penetrate the surface of that calm self-possession, that gentle composure of mien, as she sat for successive hours beside her fading charge, every thought seemingly merged in the pale occupant of the couch?

But to Mr. Montrose of the Linn, the light of day was not plainer than this love for Helen Erskine which possessed the soul of the young Laird of Bournlee. He saw it in the change of tone when he addressed her, in the softened expression of his eye as he listened to her words, in the conscious flush that welled to his brow when she entered, his abstraction in her absence, in the countless proofs only a lover interprets. Did she return it? Still was the self-control impervious.

Mr. Montrose found the struggle hard in his own

breast to subdue the burning pain of jealousy at the discovery of such a formidable rival, but Helen's demeanor to himself, in its very openness and affection, excluded all hope of his ever being aught than a friend, and so pure was the feeling he entertained for the maiden he had known from childhood, that it finally became an absorbing interest in the complication growing daily more critical before him, till he was ready to charge Helen with insensibility, as his watchful scrutiny failed to detect any consciousness of being the object of an engrossing passion.

We will not linger beside the dying bed of the frail victim of pining discontent. A long train, with Hugh Bolton at its head, once more winds its way to the family sepulchre, and the disinherited wife rests in final peace, without fear of banishment from her earthly Paradise.

The day succeeding the funeral, the orphan sisters were alone with their grief in their own apartment. With the reflective fortitude and decision characteristic of her, Helen had long been sensible of the added responsibility her mother's death would impose, and determined her course to meet such contingency. Her whole heart was drawn out with tender compassion toward the youthful Janet, now, by that mighty arbiter from whose shaft there is no escape, thrown wholly upon her protection and comfort. This was her first initiation in sorrow, so indulgent had been her nurture, and she clung to her elder sister as an infant to its first supports. They made a pretty picture in that partial twilight, little resembling save in the loving heart and their mingled tears. Midsummer was

past, and they sat near the window overlooking the back grounds. There was a murmuring wind among the trees like a symphony of wail in unison with their grief, and while all within the house was solemn stillness, without, insect life was active and busy, and the birds signalled the close of day by a responsive twitter as they resought their nests among the leaves. For days, Bruce had trod softly and gravely, as if aware that death held his court in the silent dwelling, and now lay watching the sisters with the unblenching mien of a trusty sentinel.

Janet occupied a low cushion, her head resting on her sister's lap, as was her wont with the mother for whom she wept. It was the acknowledgment of a representative and inheritor of that filial love and dependence. Helen, one arm clasping the young mourner to her heart, the other hand at times putting aside the glossy curls with which the wanton breeze would cover her wet cheek, administered the soothing consolation of the most sympathizing affection.

"Remember, darling," she said, "who it is that promises to be the father of the fatherless—even the God of the universe. His word standeth ever sure, and although we have, now, no human protector, we need not fear. We will part no more. Henceforth, you will be always with me, and my loving care shall supply the maternal tenderness whose loss we so much deplore."

The guileless Janet lifted her head and checked her tears as if with a sudden recollection.

"Dear Helen," she said, "you forgot my cousin, the laird. He promised mamma to be our protector."

The friendly twilight veiled the color that rose to the cheek of the listener.

"Janet," she replied quickly and decidedly, "do not utter such words again—we have no natural protector, and require none."

"Helen, do you think he will forfeit the pledge he gave?"

"You must explain to me, Janet, your allusions, before I can reply or even comprehend such a surprising intimation."

"You will remember the day mamma prevailed upon you to quit her for a walk to your arbor. I was alone with her in my accustomed place, but, immediately on your departure, she bade me ring for a servant; and then summoned the laird. He came at once, and, at her request, occupied your seat, near enough to hear her whispered communication. It was to commend us both to his protection. She did not banish me from the room, but only to the farthest window, so that with no intention of being a listener, I could not but learn the purport of the conversation. Mamma spoke of our desolate state and reduced income, and obtained from him a promise to shield us from the misfortunes likely to befall us. And oh, Helen! my cousin most readily and eagerly gave this assurance. Part of the colloquy did not reach my ear, but I heard my mother say, in reply to a protestation most ardently expressed from the tone of voice, 'Then, I die happy in the hope at least that they will have a home at Bournlee.' You have not forgotten her alarming exhaustion and your self-reproach for your absence. It was the result of this long consultation with the laird. Now, Helen,



this is what I meant by the assertion of our having a protector."

With the sensation of profound regret and humiliation that bowed the proud spirit of the elder sister, there mingled a feeling of wonder and tender compassion for the guileless innocence of the young creature beside her.

"My poor Janet," she said, after a pause, "how little you know of the real world, its codes of propriety, its conventional maxims, its stringent laws of delicacy and decorum. The *protection* of your cousin, the laird, as you term it, however freely and generously awarded, can never, substantially, be more to you than nominal, while to me—to me," she repeated with emphasis, "without shadow of claim in blood or lineage, it has not, nor can have existence. Let the singular interview you witnessed rest in eternal oblivion, never again to pass your lips. A promise so exacted, when refusal would have been cruel, is not binding on future action. We will dismiss the delusion from our thoughts forever."

Long after Janet was reposing in sleep, that night, did Helen Erskine pace the apartment in profound, agitated thought.

What could be the meaning of "a home at Bournlee?" Deep was her mortification at Janet's narrative.

"Can he have forgotten," she said to herself, "can he have forgotten my prompt action a few months since? But, no, it was simply a promise given to soothe and comfort the dying. He knows me better. At all events, it is and shall be inoperative."

The following day, Mr. Montrose was entrusted with letters for the post, and each hour witnessed a quiet

but steady preparation for a final removal. Helen's ordinary power of self-command could not wholly suppress a nervous excitement under Janet's revelation, but its only perceptible effect was an unusual damask on her cheek that enhanced the intellectual character of her face.

Hugh lingered, and spake not of departure, though they seldom met. Helen dreaded the final interview, and postponed till the latest moment the announcement of her design. The day previous to its arranged consummation, she visited by stealth the spots consecrated by numberless recollections, reserving the arbor to the last. Hugh having accompanied Mr. Montrose on an excursion in the vicinity, she availed herself of the opportunity to bid farewell to the retreat that bore her name, so fondly endeared by happy recollections. And never was it fairer than in this hour of parting. The little dell was overshadowed by the mountain ridge, behind which the sun was now sinking to rest, its dying rays gilding the top like an illumined line. The repose was complete, not a moor-fowl or bird broke the silence, as if the scenes familiar with her presence were in mute sympathy with her tears of adieu. The arbor was vacant, and once again she sat on her accustomed seat with the ever-faithful Bruce by her side, to admire, as of old, the graceful branches and intertwining vines that overarched her head. Something new meets her eye, through its tears. The words, "Helen's Arbor," artistically wrought, are opposite the entrance. She felt a blush rise with the consciousness of the artist. It admonishes her not to tarry, and with a lingering look, she turns to retrace her path in haste. A step

announces another visitor, and to her dismay, the young laird stands in the doorway.

Recovering forcibly her threatened self-possession, Helen, with a quiet salutation, inquires for his companion.

"We separated," he answered, "at the cross-road leading to the Linn, and I hurried hither on alighting, to witness this fine sunset, with no thought, Miss Erskine, of so abrupt an invasion of your province. In truth, I have so long found the arbor untenanted as to have presumed upon its desolation. Even Bruce," he continued, turning to him, "no more condescends to visit his mistress's domain."

"As you once," replied Helen, forcing a smile, "styled it mine by right of appellation and discovery, you will now permit me to make a formal transfer of *the arbor* with all its privileges to the Laird of Bournlee. I visit it for the last time. To-morrow we set out for our home in Glasgow."

"Indeed!" said Hugh, amazed,— "so soon!—and to Glasgow! This is the first, the only intimation I have received of such a purpose, Miss Erskine."

"It is a simple and natural one," replied she; "I must needs abandon my late vocation for Janet's sake, and with the income at our disposal, a residence in Glasgow is entirely feasible. It was my intention to solicit an interview with you, to-night, preparatory to our final leave-taking, but this unexpected meeting will obviate the necessity. My gratitude for your goodness, especially to my mother, cannot be adequately expressed, but it is indelible. Adieu, till to-morrow."

But her exit was stayed by a hand outstretched to bar the outlet.

"Not thus, Miss Erskine," said Hugh, with emotion, "not thus do we part. Is the life of the past few weeks spent in the joy of your presence no more than a bright dream that fades with the morning, and shall I waken to find it an illusion, a tale that is told? Must my whole being be plunged in darkness after basking in sunlight till it was steeped in happiness? Helen, I asked not, recked not, if there were a chord of response, but revelled in the intoxicating present as if there were no future,—day by day looking to the morrow but as a reflecting mirror, with no menacing cloud to dim its lustre. Helen, have you, indeed, been blind to my absorbing love, or is it to you a thing of naught? As one pleading for life neglects no accessories, may I adduce the sanction of your departed mother?" . . . . .

Alas, for the fatal invocation from the tomb, this untoward remembrance! Helen Erskine had not been insensible to the impassioned torrent that fell from his lips, but, in a moment, as if the ghost of that interview rose between them, the memory of Janet's narrative, the demand upon his sympathy, the exaction of his protection, fell with icy hand upon her heart and extinguished the kindling flame. All else was forgotten, and her sudden pallor, the bowed head raised, the softened eye become almost stern in its pride, the marked change in her whole figure, checked Hugh's further utterance, and he involuntarily awaited the solution in her reply.

It was not delayed, and was concise, decided, and unfaltering. Hugh Bolton receives a sentence adverse to his hopes, and ere he realized the stunning blow

Helen had left the arbor and he was alone, his heart lacerated by a haughty rejection, and he stood desolate and despairing, the very scenes he, but now, loved for their beauty, clothed in the sombre drapery of his bitter disappointment. He tarried long in the silent arbor, and though the moon lent the full beams of her brightness to cheer him, and many a sweet note from the leafy coverts would fain have attuned his spirit to harmony, and the cool zephyrs of night whispered of hopes yet existing, he hearkened not to their siren voices, and there seemed no longer aught of earth to desire.

Did sleep come that night, as restorer to the fevered mind of Helen Erskine? Oh no. Vainly did she seek in the recollection of her hasty repulse to winnow a single word of gentle appreciation to palliate its abruptness. Had he merited a rejection so chilling, or was there need of so proud an assertion of self-esteem and dignity? But, regret it as she may, the deed is done, and delicacy warrants no recall. She must e'en abide the consequence of her own act, though remorse and grief rend her soul.

The vehicle awaits to bear them to a new home. Mr. Montrose stands equipped for the journey with them. All is ready, and they are gathered in the hall. The Laird of the Linn holds back for Hugh's precedence. He is there, grave and silent, and turns to Janet, proffering his arm for acceptance. At the last moment, Helen Erskine, releasing herself from Mr. Montrose, approaches Hugh Bolton, and extending her hand, said,—

"I am not ungrateful, believe me. Be lenient in your judgment as you can."

They are gone, and the young laird is left alone gazing on vacancy till the most distant sound of wheels dies upon the ear.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

Does earth then afford no resting-place, shut out from care and sorrow, where man may find peace and gladness and defy the storms of fate? Is there no fair Isle, girt with the sea, apart from the strife and din of the great world, where he may, amid celestial beauty, repose and fear no evil? There is no Heaven below the skies, no Paradise for the embodied spirit. Each human heart is a world, and contains within itself the momentous issues of bliss or woe. We have seen in the gilded saloons of Merindale House, the trail of a serpent betokening poison in the flowing cup—amid the sylvan tranquillity of the Highlands, a blight withering its blooming flowers. To the superficial glance, all may seem well without; but only let doubt enter the inner man, and neither the glitter of magnificence and array, nor loveliness of the most enchanting nature can allay the tempest of this human heart.

We parted with the inmates of Merindale House shortly after the brilliant mask of the Italian Embassy. The nervous excitability of constant expectancy that harassed the mind of Lucia Courtney was, at length, brought to a crisis. To her extreme agitation she was, one morning, summoned to attend her uncle in the library. She found him wearing a grave countenance,

but, even more than usual, expressive of tenderness and affection.

"See, my child," said he, "what an important missive I have received to-day. This is a communication from Conte Stefano Amari, announcing his arrival in England, among the retinue of the Duca di L. The period affixed by your father for the ratification or dissolution of your betrothal is fulfilled, and the other party to the bond now presents himself in readiness for its consummation, if such be your pleasure. The Conte solicits my approval of his suit and requests permission to make his devoirs in person. What shall be my response?"

She essayed to reply, but could not.

"Why this trepidation, my little Italia?" said the earl, smiling as if to rally his trembling auditor. "There is not, nor shall be, any force upon your inclination. Remember, the time is past of stern guardians, captive beauty in a turret, and bars and bolts. But we must at least receive this young stranger; it would be but scant courtesy to refuse him that. He was, as I understand, your companion from childhood: therefore he occupies the footing of an early friend. I must, unavoidably, give my sanction to his prompt admittance, other relations being of ulterior consideration. What say you to an introduction at two o'clock to-morrow?"

"I submit it to your judgment, uncle," she replied, if not with composure, with more outward restraint of feeling, "only" . . . . She paused as if fearing the reception her request might find.

"Only what?" asked the earl.

"Only that I might see him alone at the first interview."

Lord Merindale looked inquiringly, but perceiving a threatened return of her tremor, he acquiesced, and, dismissing her with a loving word of encouragement, quickly despatched a response to the *biglietto* of the Conte Stefano.

The interval was passed by our fair Venetian in a state of the most restless disquietude. The suspicion that had so long haunted her mind as to the identity of her betrothed with the young noble in the sad drama related by Mr. Staumore had, at length, become incontrovertible from the facts of his name, his being of the ambassador's suite, and his presence at the ball, where his voice was recognized by Hugh Bolton during the entanglement of the rapier. His part in the tragic scene they witnessed at Venice she could only interpret as inconstancy to herself and criminal perjury to the hapless victim of his broken vows, and consequently her indignant grief had attained its climax. By nature, a true child of the sun, she was ardent and impetuous to a fault, and imbuing this one idea with all the coloring her high-wrought imagination could picture, restraint and moderation seemed impossible. She contrasted her own devotion to the memories of past times, her faith amid trains of admirers and seductions of pleasure, never, even in thought, swerving from the tie that bound her to him, but fondly looking to the era of its consummation as an Eden opening to her view. Thus, with no doubt whereby to suspend a judgment and with strenuous effort at calmness of exterior on the basis of what she believed a virtuous and imperative indignation, yet shaken to the centre of her soul, she heard the announcement of his arrival



beneath the same roof with herself, and descended to meet her betrothed lover and once cherished associate of her happiest days.

Ere she enters, we will describe the visitor for whom a reception so unexpected is imminent.

A figure more striking or interesting than the Conte Stefano Amari had seldom appeared in the London world. Above the ordinary stature, he presented a well-moulded form, grave, dignified mien characteristic of Venetians of the old régime, hair of jet black, eyes of the same, to which the heavy fringe and brow added an intenser shade, an oval face, clear olive complexion, mouth beneath the silken moustache expressive of firmness and benevolence. His attire, somewhat modified to comport with the prevailing mode in London, retained enough of Venetian costume at its proudest era, to give him a *distingué* appearance. He might, in fine, very nearly in dress and altogether in feature, have represented one of the Titian portraits so numerous in the picture-gallery of his father's villa on the Brenta.

Scarcely had she passed the threshold of the room in which he sat than he advanced with *empressement* to greet the playmate of his childhood, the companion of his youth, the betrothed of his early manhood, now, to his charmed view, ripened and developed into matchless beauty.

"*Alfine! oh, beata ora—Lucia mia, piu bella!*" But the volume of melody in the most classic of the Italian dialects, the Venetian, was checked by the stately air of the fiancée. In profound unconsciousness of the problem at work, he simply attributed this

demeanor to a coy assumption of the decorous reserve demanded by the addition of two or three years to her maidenhood, and inculcated in this frigid region as essential to the maintenance of dignity in her sex in circumstances like the present.

Gallantly handing her to a seat and placing himself beside her, he said in good English, with a slight foreign accent,—

“Not for the first time, since arriving in London, do I behold the image for years so vividly present to me, whether sleeping or waking. You little dreamed, Signorina, who was gazing, at the peril of his vision, at the planet, outvying in gorgeous rays the bright orb of day, that illumined the *bal masque* of the Duca di L., nor that it was the companion of your youthful days, in our beautiful Venice, whose rapier so discourteously imperilled your lace drapery, nor that there was one in the gay throng wholly intent on the tardy hour of the banquet which should unveil to his impatient eye the features so longed for.”

No language could picture the sensations of his auditor as she listened to such words and tones, recalling the past, untarnished by doubt or shadow of suspicion; but, repelling the rising emotions of trust and faith by the phantom of perjury, suicide, and remorse, she replied with evident effort but not without a shade of sarcastic significance.

“I had not, indeed, such prescience, Signor Conte. My thoughts, in the midst of that sumptuous fête, were, verily, rather engrossed with the immortal dead than the living, whether present or absent. Among the numerous objects of virtu and the *chefs-d'œuvre*,

dispersed through the suite of apartments at the Italian Embassy, there were several statues in the Royal Saloon, as it is called, from its purple hangings and a fine portrait of the Duca's sovereign in his robes of Majesty. These statues variously represented the virtues, such as Faith, Hope, Constancy, etc. Of these, the latter especially fixed my attention, it being the first sculptured model of that rarest of virtues that I had ever chanced to behold. To your more artistic judgment, Signor Amari, perchance this ideal of Constancy in the lineaments of woman presented nothing more than an emblem of a minor virtue, scarcely visible in presence of the Apollo or the Hercules."

"*Perdonami*, Signorina, if I hasten to protest against such a divination of my preference in art. While, in common with all the world, I award due admiration to those celebrated monuments of human skill and genius, yet the sentiment they inspire is only admiration, mingled with wonder. There are other works of art which, viewed with critical eye, might, *in minutia*, reveal defects of conception and finish, but which, *in extenso*, strike the chord of love in the soul. Never shall I withhold from the Apollo, the Hercules, or the Venus de' Medici, their merited and involuntary tribute; but a deeper, warmer emotion thrills my being before the sculptured form of the divine Saviour, a Madonna of Titian, or those very statues that attracted you. But wherefore, Signorina, pronounce Constancy so superlatively rare, or impute to me contempt for its excellence? May I not retort upon your neglect of Faith, standing in such bold relief, the chief figure of the group? To my eye, meantime, the fair model of

Hope was the most charming of them all. Like a weary mariner tossed on the waves of a long suspense, I sought, in this mute emblem, the inspiration needed to cheer and encourage my impatient spirit."

"Can Faith survive Hope, Signor?" she asked. "What if the mariner behold this beacon-light, like the ignis fatuus that betrays the unwary traveller, flicker for an instant and finally sink to rekindle no more?"

"Then," he replied, "he may but perish in the breakers and find rest in the ocean's bed. But our converse has followed a grave, and, to me, enigmatical channel. Let us turn aside, *La Bella*, to another scene portrayed in the *Duca's* collection. It is one scarce faded in your memory, and, as I may trust without presumption, endeared to you as to myself by past associations. The sunrise on the *Friuli* mountains will not have escaped your observation?"

"Oh, no," she said; "there, the painter has, indeed, done justice to a view unrivalled in nature, and for awhile, my tears flowed freely beneath my kindly domino, as, in fancy, the shades of the beloved dead moved again among those embowered retreats."

"And had the living then no presence in that fair picture of other days?" he inquired, in a tone of sorrow. "Does the canvas afford no scope for the image of one wont to be ever by your side in those cliffs or mountain valleys? Or has this merry England, by its very contrast, obliterated Venice and her silent Isles from your pleasant memories? In my recluse life on the *Brenita*, there sometimes reached my ear, like distant sounds of revelry, reports of the animated magnificence of regal London, and perhaps, to Miss

Courtney's advanced taste, the peaceful imagery of rambles in the Friuli mountains is, in comparison, but the unreal romance of Arcadia with its shepherd's reed and homely pastoral."

"Not so, Signor Conte, not so," she answered quickly; "even in the commotion of this fashionable vortex, the thought of my native Venice has risen as a dream of repose awaiting the tired pilgrim. Nor does terra firma contain aught so dear to my heart as the mountains of Friuli, so faithfully delineated in the Duca's picture. But as the sun which under the painter's touch gilds, with such a blaze of glory, those well-known cliffs and green valleys, so with my happy Italian girlhood. For years, a path of unclouded sunshine and joyous anticipation, destined to a turning-point of bitter disappointment and misery."

"There is a mysterious significance in your words, Miss Courtney (for, doubtless, you prefer your Anglicized appellation), whose meaning I must ask of your courtesy. Your manner and language are equally inexplicable to me."

"That bright scene, Signor," she replied, "illustrated by the great master, might well represent one phase of a shifting panorama, wherein moved, side by side, the figures of two beings in the first flush of early youth. In the pure and innocent ardor of young affection, their life was one summer-day, unmarred by thought or fear of future reverse. Naught knew they of Faith or Hope or Constancy,—all was to them, the perfect trust of unsullied hearts. As time goes on, their paths divide, and now, the canvas presents a second phase, not unlike, yet not the same. One of

the figures is still a wanderer beneath the green bowers of his earlier days. He is not alone, but this is not the companion who, once, shared his every thought and wish. She has passed to other shores and a stranger fills her vacant place. It is but the oft-repeated story of human love. You remember, Signor Amari, we learn from Zanoni the wisdom of replacing by fresh flowers the drooping petals that wither in our vases."

"Do not pause, Miss Courtney," said the Conte, in evident surprise and excitement, which to Lucia seemed only conscious guilt; "do not pause, I beseech you: the romance is not ended; there is no doubt a finale of interest."

"Aye, Signor Conte, there is a finale. Then, must I unroll farther this vivid panorama with its developed import? Behold! Signor Amari! It is a picture more sombre than the mountain-tops of Friuli lighted by the rising sun. A lowly chamber, its gloom dispelled by a fitful gleam of declining day—a couch, not for peaceful slumber, but of rest to the dying victim of reckless despair—on the one side kneels a priest with rosary and cross; but the passing soul gives little heed to invocation or the sacred emblem of religious faith. Her eyes turn with the fulness of an earthly love to the other side; and now, know you, Signor, whose is the figure bending there overwhelmed with remorseful grief? It is still the same. The hero of the drama, whose opening scene, luminous with morning sunlight, now closes with its setting rays amid the valley and shadow of death. It is a dark but life-like portraiture, Signor. Has the limner been faithful, or does he outline but the fictions of his own night-dreams?"

"Your picture, Miss Courtney, is too real not to have been drawn by a spectator. The messenger commissioned to summon me to this mournful scene was, I remember, an Englishman, and it is he to whose espionage I am indebted for so malign and unwarranted a *pronunciamento*. But, if still upon the surface of the globe, his insolence will receive a merited chastisement. Let that pass. At present, there are interests infinitely higher and more important. I cease to marvel, Miss Courtney, that among the group of the virtues in the Duca's saloon, the statue of Faith was unheeded by you. It touched no responsive chord in your soul, and simply stood before you as the marble image of an unknown sentiment, for that is but its counterfeit which yields at the first onset, and lends a ready ear to the whispered slander of a presumptuous version. It would not be difficult to expunge from my escutcheon this stain upon its truth and honor,—but wherefore? I could never blot from my memory the truth that you had determined my sentence, peremptorily, without appeal, in my unconscious, defenceless absence. Lucia, unbroken has been my faith, unwavering my constancy, and with hope as an anchor, I have watched with eager impatience the dawn of the prescribed hour, to lay at your feet the heart that has never, even in thought, wandered, a moment, from the betrothed of my youth. But neither my spirit nor the blood of my ancient house, prouder in its decay than in the full splendor of its former glory, brooks imputation on its honor or deigns appeal from an arbitrary tribunal which has prejudged defence by instant condemnation. Adieu, beautiful object of my boyish

dreams, and maturer imaginings. The vision is over. I leave you free to choose from the brilliant train that surrounds your steps, the homage and devotion on which rests no blight of suspicion or stain of inconstancy."

He arose, and with one long gaze at the face now colorless as the marble statues they had been discussing, and with a silent bend of his stately form, Conte Stefano left the apartment. The next moment, the heavy reverberation of the hall-door fell upon her ear as it closed upon him, and seemed to Lucia Courtney to sound the knell of her buried hopes.

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## CHAPTER XX.

HUGH BOLTON found all England astir with the martial note of preparation for the Crimean war.

A few days after his arrival in London he encountered Sir Ashleigh Harcourt, in full equipment as Colonel in the Guards.

"Ha, Bolton!" he exclaimed, "where have you been this age? 'Away in the Highlands a-hunting the deer,' eh? You find us transformed since your exit from Babel. Instead of quiet loungers at the club, nonchalant butterflies basking in the smile of beauty, or guzzling the duca's *bianco vino* in Venetian crystal, behold warriors armed cap-a-pie to do battle for the Turk against the encroachment of the Northern Bear."



"In truth, Sir Ashleigh," replied Hugh, "Mars seems in the ascendant. How soon do you embark?"

"In a week, my dear fellow, in a week. While we phlegmatic Islanders have been debating our policy, our impetuous allies are already far on the highway of nations. The Lion should not tarry in the wake of the Tricolor."

Hugh next inquired for the circle at Lord Merindale's. There was a sudden check to his friend's enthusiasm.

"Ah, Bolton," said he, "there you touch me to the quick. I leave England at the most interesting period of my life, and, moreover, in suspense."

"Indeed! has the brilliant Lucia overpowered you?" asked Hugh, smiling.

"No, no; not that gorgeous exotic. I should be consumed by such dazzling rays. The lily for me, ever, in preference to the damask-rose with all its luscious beauty and fragrance. To your question, meanwhile, they have left town for the castle, and, by ill-luck, just as military duty obliges me to remain in London. For some time previous to their departure, too, they admitted no one because of Miss Courtney's sudden and violent illness. The fates have been unpropitious, positively."

"Their removal, of course, implies Miss Courtney's convalescence?" said Hugh.

"Only partial," replied the baronet. "It was on the nerves, and very alarming. They speak of a tour on the Continent, a winter in Italy, her native air, which the earl thinks would be sovereign. This project, however, she opposes, and pleads for quiet seclu-

sion at Merindale as her best sedative. At all hazards, I must get a furlough of a few hours at least to join them there, before I bid 'my native land good-night.' It may be a final leave-taking, you know, Bolton. Todleben has made the Russian fortress a hard nut, and ere it is cracked many a poor fellow must fall in the trenches."

"What of Egmont and Faulkner? Not yet returned from their wanderings?" asked Hugh.

"Egmont is, by one grade, my superior officer," replied he, "and joins his regiment at some point nearer the seat of war. His uniform, like mine, has been, hitherto, but a holiday attire. No Bond Street in front of Sebastopol; and I suspect, *entre nous*, the young Sybarite of a noble stock will relish little the transition from Florence, a lounge at the *Pitti* in the morning, or evening spent in *un trattenimento musicale* of a dark-eyed contessa, to the monotony of tent-life, camp-regulation, etc."

"And Faulkner?"

"Oh, Faulkner was at first, I believe, excited to follow suit by purchasing a commission forthwith, but on reflection, the post of volunteer subordinate not according with his aristocratic habits, fastidiousness was stronger than patriotism, and he declines to exchange the Arno for the Black Sea."

Their attention was, at that moment, diverted by the appearance of a gentleman passing, of figure too striking to escape notice. He was evidently foreign, from his dress and air, of dignified, commanding port, though little beyond early manhood. To Sir Ashleigh's whispered comments, Hugh, presuming probably on the

stranger's ignorance of the language, replied audibly that "he had seen him in Italy." To their surprise, the gentleman immediately turned, and, approaching Bolton, said in good English,—

"Pardon me, sir, but your remark unavoidably caught my ear. Have the goodness to add in what part of Italy we have met before."

Hugh, with imperturbable composure, though inwardly astonished, and looking steadfastly at the stranger, answered,—

"Though rather unused to be accosted thus abruptly, I will not refuse a reply to a question so simple. It was at Venice, and by a sad chance, that I have been enabled to recognize you."

"Then, sir," rejoined the stranger, "you are certainly the person I seek to discover. By an assumed, unauthorized interpretation of circumstances that then occurred, and a detail of the same to others, you have inflicted on me the deadliest injury, and which requires satisfaction. You will easily comprehend my meaning. This gentleman is perhaps your friend, and with his consent, I will engage one on my side, to arrange preliminaries for a meeting to-morrow at the hour he shall appoint."

"Sir," replied Hugh sternly, "I do not comprehend your meaning, and your terms, *interpretation*, *detail*, and *injury* are as mystical to me as yourself and this most extraordinary address. Nor am I a duellist either in principle or practice. Your supposition that this gentleman is my friend is a true one, but I decline, at your dictation, to test his regard by constituting him an accessory to a hostile violation of laws human and divine."

"And yet you do not deny that you were the person sent to summon me to the sad scene of which you acknowledge yourself a spectator, and after reaching England, rendered a circumstantial report of the same according to your own version, to a lady, whose name it needs not to recall to you, and which I forbear thus publicly to announce?"

"Though not the messenger himself, that office was benevolently undertaken by my travelling companion, at my especial instance, induced by motives of which you were informed at the time. As to the charge of making report, circumstantial or otherwise, it is both false and presumptuous. And now, sir, are your interrogatories ended? I confess myself somewhat weary of such cross-examination by one quite unknown to me."

"As Mr. Bolton's friend, sir," said the baronet, "allow me so far to interpose in this singular discussion, not in the hostile capacity suggested by you, but as a voucher for his unblemished truth and honor, whether in the past or present. What he asserts I am ready to maintain and defend at all times and places." He then handed the stranger his card.

During this latter colloquy, as he was about to reply to Sir Ashleigh, a fourth personage appeared on the stage, and another voice, exclaiming, with a familiar tap of Bolton's arm,—

"How fares the Highland chieftain? Ah, Harcourt, we shall soon hear enough of pibroch and bagpipe, and see the tartan outvying the gold lace of the Guards. Our Scotch cousins are always eager for the fray."

"What an unlucky *contretemps*!" said Hugh to him-

self. "I must use strategy to prevent an explosion. Ha, Mr. Stanmore!" he said aloud, and shaking the member cordially by the hand, "on your way to the House? I will not detain you, but follow quickly in your footsteps."

"Presently, my good fellow," he replied. "No haste. I will await you. Our Venetian Lothario, I opine?" he whispered.

The young Conte, whom the reader will have recognized in the foreigner, arrested in his meditated response to Sir Ashleigh by this arrival, and looking intently at Mr. Stanmore, said,—

"Permit me to inquire, sir, if I do not behold in you the bearer of a message to my villa on the Brenta, summoning me to Venice, some time since, and whither you accompanied me in my gondola?"

"Precisely, sir," replied the member. "Happy to meet you under less melancholy auspices."

"The auspices, sir," said the Conte, hotly, "through your officious malignity, are not less melancholy. I charge you with slander and misrepresentation, and demand the reparation due my injured honor."

So saying, he cast his glove in the face of the amazed Mr. Stanmore.

"By Jove, Sir Lothario, I will not balk you!" was his rejoinder, and the next instant cards were exchanged.

To Hugh's entreaties, that explanation might first be attempted, they were both deaf, Mr. Stanmore indignantly repelling every effort and remonstrance.

"No more, Bolton!" he cried, "an' thou lovest me. Never fear; I can play at single-stick, and quickly

trip this Signor Maypole, for I do not care to run him through. No, Harcourt, I will not have you cashiered by any means. Another friend will do me this service. All very true, what you say, Bolton, about 'sin and force of example'; but the touch of that Lombardy-Poplar's glove is still on my cheek, and must be expunged. This quarrel, remember, is not of my seeking."

Thus, in great excitement, he entered a hackney-coach and drove rapidly away, his antagonist being already out of sight in the opposite direction. The two friends exchanged looks of perplexity and dismay.

"Is this the Italian, do you suppose, to whom Miss Courtney is betrothed?" inquired Sir Ashleigh. "I was one of Mr. Stanmore's auditors at the recital of the incident that seems to be the element of this controversy."

"The same, I presume," replied Hugh. "But instant measures must be taken to prevent this meeting. I will, forthwith, invoke the restraint of the laws. My dear Sir Ashleigh, co-operate with me, I beseech you, in arresting this hostile design. Think of the probable consequences of its execution. Is there a more daring, open transgression of the divine law, a bolder defiance of Him, who gave the command, 'Thou shalt do no murder'? You will not, I trust, be unmindful of the guilt we should ourselves incur by passively refraining from interference, through motives of false delicacy or respect for artificial codes."

"Is there any possible means of intervention?" responded the baronet. "Mr. Stanmore has not only been publicly affronted, but is, moreover, the challenged party. Remonstrance with him would therefore be

utterly futile. Recollect the imputation which would inevitably attach to his name forever. Nothing less than apology and retraction from his antagonist can avail anything, and of that, you are well aware, there is no shadow of hope. My regret equals your own, but I confess, no alternative presents itself to my mind."

"At all events, then," said Hugh, "the officers of the law shall be on their track, and I with them, to the field. Meanwhile, where is the ground usually appropriated to such deadly rencontres?"

"I marvel at your simplicity, my friend, in that query," replied the baronet. "Men bent on such hostile intents usually select spots of little note, whose names compose a long catalogue. They so contrive as to elude the preventive obstacles you are devising."

It needs not to prolong the narrative by detailing preliminaries of such an unhallowed proceeding. The young Conte, reared in the traditionary maxims which prescribe deadly combat, the deliberate defiance of the great Invisible, to avoid the dreaded scoff of the puny creature of His hand, and as the test of physical courage, and redress of wounded honor, under influence of the most agonized disappointment, seeing the whole fabric of his earthly happiness he had vainly thought built upon a rock impregnable to storm and flood, dashed to earth by wanton malice, listened only to the monitions of revenge upon the individual he had constituted the author of his misery; while Mr. Stanmore, ignorant of the full implication attached to himself, and unconscious of aught save the repetition of an episode in his travels, and not imagining the existence of per-

sonal interest in his audience, saw little beyond the unprovoked assault and necessity to avenge it. Suffice it to say, that all Hugh's efforts to forestall the meeting by the aid of authorized officials were fruitless. Neither watch nor ward could prevent the egress of the parties, and the proposed encounter took place apart from the ordinary resorts chosen for like purposes, and it was not till noon of the same day that the two friends learned the details of the occurrence. The adversaries met and shots were exchanged, Mr. Stanmore receiving a wound in the arm, the Conte escaping with slight injury from a ball that grazed his side. Amid Hugh's extreme anxiety and suspense, he experienced relief at an issue less unfavorable than he had feared, and became his friend's most assiduous nurse. Conte Stefano Amari embarked at once for his own land, without other solace than that of having inflicted physical retribution on another whom he arbitrarily pronounced his worst enemy.

We next meet the baronet at Merindale Castle. He found the earl excited and disturbed by the report of the duel contained in the morning papers. He eagerly sought elucidation of the affair from Sir Ashleigh, but made few comments, though his gravity increased at the relation which the baronet gave with as much reserve as the earl's persistent inquiries allowed.

Lord Merindale announced his intention of passing the winter on the Continent, possibly at Nice or Rome, with a view to the restoration of Miss Courtney, whom he represented as still suffering the consequences of her late illness in passive languor and debility alarming and painful to witness.



"I much apprehend," said he, "that she is developing the same infirmity of constitution which, in her mother, forbade a residence in our cold northern isle, and have, therefore, determined, even in opposition to her wishes, to try the experiment of a milder region, perhaps her own Venice, for a few months, or longer, if need be."

Sir Ashleigh was shocked and amazed at the ravages of recent illness in the beautiful Italian. Pallid, almost attenuated, and, in place of her natural vivacity, listless abstraction or a forced gaiety too flimsy to deceive. Notwithstanding the presence of the fair lily, as he loved to call the sweet Lady Isabel, the magnet that had irresistibly drawn him to the castle ere departing on his warlike mission, he could not, without deep regret, behold the change, or avoid apprehending a fatal crisis, that, to his eye, appeared rapidly approaching.

And how fared his suit with the young Châtelaine of the castle? He could only glean encouragement from the rising blush on her modest cheek when he drew near, or the drooping lash as he addressed her.

He laid his proposals before the earl, who, without altogether discouraging hope, withstood his wishes for an affiancement till he should return from the Crimea. Fortune, however, favored the disappointed lover with an accidental interview of a few minutes, and in many an hour of hardship and trial during the protracted siege, did the memory of a tear in her soft, blue eye, and her blushing tremor, as he bade her adieu, comfort his heart and cheer him on, to deserve by heroic deeds the reward he so coveted,—the love of that gentle being.

## CHAPTER XXI.

IN one of the principal thoroughfares of busy Glasgow stood the unattractive abode in which dwelt the thrifty Laird of Bournlee during the years of his commercial life, when heart, soul, and mind were intent on "heaping up riches, not knowing who should gather them." Successful enterprise filled his coffers with gold for the son that never came, and when wealth overflowed till there was no longer room to bestow his goods, he built him larger barns, and returned to his ancestral halls to take his ease.

But the soul he would fain have pampered with the fruit laid up for many years, was suddenly required at his hands by its great Owner, and lo! the covetous master of a renovated domain possesses naught of his labor save the narrow spot of earth wherein he rests; and a stranger enters upon the harvest of his long and arduous toil.

Such is short-sighted man! He moves, restlessly, to and fro, unrolling the prospectus of his plans for a futurity of Time which he vainly measures with Eternity, and when the climax of his worldly conceptions is reached, the curtain of life falls, he finds nothing in his hand, and before his eyes, only the interminable space of that spirit-land into which the material may not enter. It is a history daily repeating itself, and yet the sands of the dial bear with them

the memories and warnings of the hour, and they pass unheeded as the dreams of a night.

The house, for which the reputed coheiresses of the rich laird had exchanged the Highlands, was substantial and sufficiently commodious for its small circle of inmates. It was originally selected by the testator as adapted, by its relative position and economical dimensions, to the due furtherance of his ends. In front, the windows offered to view the unvaried tumult of commercial activity, with its accompanying whirl and din to the ear; at the back, there was the little court of which its former mistress spoke so contemptuously. The present domestic household consisted of her maid, a matronly woman, who had followed the mother to the Highlands, and now willingly attached herself to the diminished fortunes of her descendants, and, for assistant, a Glasgow lass, as maid of all work.

We cannot withhold our sympathy from Helen Erskine, under endurance of such a contrast, from tranquil beauty to the noise and homeliness of passing multitudes engrossed in material cares,—or from the more youthful Janet, forced to leave her burns and free rambles among the braes and heather, for the circumscribed limits of stone-walls and conventional rules. Did Helen repine at this fate? Did tears dim her eyes at the tide of recollections this contrast would provoke? Was her step languid, her cheek paler, at the image of her arbor, the brook in the valley, the mountain line, the nightingale that made the stillness vocal, the lark whose morning-clarion she loved to hear?

By nature, more grave than gay, she had from her school-mates acquired the cognomen of "Lady Helen;" and if an additional shade of seriousness attended the recollections Janet would recall, it was repressed by a strong will; or did her imagination present the last eventful hour in her arbor, the thrill of mingled pain and pleasure was, perforce, stilled, and the temptation to meditate thereon overcome by diligent occupation. To her careful tending, her watchful circumspection, was entrusted, for weal or woe, in time and, in a measure, for eternity, the young life now opening like a spring flower to the sunshine or to the storms of earth. Helen Erskine saw her work before her and was not unmindful of the responsibility it involved, nor did she shrink from her allotted duty. The mother's spoiled darling, and simply, in the laird's eyes, a pretty lassie whose birth was an era of great disappointment, Janet had ranged like a bird, at will, and loved better the hill-side and glen than the studious restriction of lessons with her governess. The rules and decorum of a public institution would have been to her as a captive chain to a young fawn accustomed to fen and moor. Helen disdained to bemoan her own lot, though to no one was dearer the beautiful nature with which she had parted; but her heart would sometimes swell with tender compassion as she beheld Janet pining at this comparative imprisonment to the perfect freedom she had left behind, and fresh vows would rise in her heart to supply, at least, to the orphan girl, the maternal affection whereof death had deprived her.

It was at twilight, a few weeks after they had been

domiciled in their new home, that we find them in the little back parlor; Helen sitting, as if plunged in thought, and the younger sister in the familiar posture she used to occupy, on a low cushion, at her mother's knee. The furniture was the same as in the laird's occupancy, simple and homely in style. Shortly after their removal, however, packages had arrived from Bournlee, considered, according to the invoice, their lawful appendages, as having specially pertained to their mother. The store was a liberal one, and yet, with all Helen's independent pride, the classification was too sacred to be rejected. Thus, the modern mingled with the ancient in the unostentatious dwelling, not unlike an old dowager in the midst of a group of richly-attired damsels in fashionable mode. The fauteuil in which Helen sat, and Janet's cushion, are the same we noticed at Hugh's first admission to the family drawing-room. The harp and piano held a conspicuous place in the arrangement. The starling had come with them to Glasgow which he had learned to hate from his invalid mistress; but Bruce had reverted to the Laird of the Linn, instead of being condemned to the narrow precincts of the present habitation. Janet knew life only in the Highlands, and there all her reminiscences centred. The topic had a sad charm for the elder sister, and they oftentimes lived over again their days of former happiness.

For awhile they had been silent, as if dwelling in imagination among the scenes they were reviving, but still recurring to the favorite theme, Janet resumed,—

“Dear Helen, I always loved the gloaming. There is the dairy-farm of Glenshiels, you know of, whither I

was wont to run over the little bridge that crosses the pretty burn at the far end of the valley. And then, when I turned homeward in the gloaming, I would tarry to watch the will-o'-the-wisp, here and there, down among the fern, lighting his lantern. Katrine taught me a nursery song about 'the Elfin King in the gloaming,' that I still remember. But best of all was it to see the kye come home, and hear their bells tinkle in the distance. And there was the roebuck, too, drinking under the hazel, and the merle overhead going to his rest in the copse. Oh, Helen, it was sweet to dwell in the Highlands!"

The picture of her innocent pleasures suffused poor Janet's eyes with tears. The elder sister was full of sympathy for the caged bird pining for liberty, and never failed to exert her fine powers to soothe and mingle entertainment with words of comfort and reconciliation with their lot: subduing the emotion such rural memories excited in her own breast, she would give their discourse a cheerful tone, till the light-hearted lassie regained her smiles.

"In our French readings, dearest," she replied, "we shall find interest in Madame de Genlis' works. Your 'kye of Glenshiels' recalls a pretty incident she relates, which I will repeat to you. She was sojourning, one summer, at a dairy-farm in France, and expresses her delight in listening to the music of the cow-bells, each one attuned to a different note. The number was large, and, as they trooped home at evening, the effect she describes as most pleasing."

Another silence after Janet's applause of Madame de Genlis' incident, and again she resumed,—

"Helen, why did Mr. Montrose fail to tell us of the young laird, if he were yet at Bournlee? How disconsolate he looked as we departed, his eyes fixed on the carriage as if for the last time! But, strange that he does not live in the beautiful Highlands instead of London, which must be worse than Glasgow."

"Duty, Janet, is better than self-gratification," was the reply. "But, now, what say you to the 'Young Lochinvar?' It was mamma's favorite song, you remember."

In this and like ways passed the hours of the orphans. Helen Erskine repaid to his neglected daughter the debt of a liberal culture bestowed upon her by the late laird, reaping reward in the improvement of her pupil.

Thus, did the winter glide away in peace and contentment, but, with the spring, revived afresh Janet's recollections of Bournlee and its freedom, and Helen witnessed, with painful apprehension, the fading cheek and languid step of the once blooming girl, the conviction forcing itself upon her mind of an imperative change of air and scene, a return, at least in kind, to the pure breezes and unshackled exercise of the Highlands, if she would arrest the home-sickness evidently operating on this delicate frame as a canker at the root of the rose-tree.

Here, then, was cause for alarm, for perplexity, for which a remedy appeared even to the elder sister, the shield, and, as it were, a guardian angel, beyond her power to attain. Whither could she translate this fading flower for reinvigoration ere it perish? Not to the region for which it thirsted for refreshment,

pine and droop as might the parched blossom. To the Linn? There, too, delicacy barred the gates, and its vicinage to Bournlee constituted an insurmountable obstacle. Summer-tide was advancing, and if beneath the balm of spring this wild rose of the nook and dingle wilted thus, how should it survive the torrid heat, panting within this narrow prison-house?

Poor Helen's heart well-nigh fainted,—the thought of herself entered little into the consideration, though, verily, with the anxiety of her difficult responsibility and violent transposition of state, the pure cheek was whiter and the brow care-worn. At length, when the subject was threadbare by continual agitation, she recalled a Welsh cousin of her father, to whose benevolent kindness during her short widowhood in Glasgow their mother had gratefully referred in her extremity, and determined to silence the suggestions of ceremony and for Janet's sake apply to him for relief. The purpose was promptly executed, and a letter forwarded proposing a sojourn in Wales for the summer months. In a week's time the answer came with a cordial welcome to their healthful but secluded retreat. Helen wasted not the hours till their departure, and very soon, attended by the matronly domestic, Edith Laidlaw, the orphan sisters set out on their journey to repair the ravages of a changed estate in the quaint and craggy land of North Wales.

Rev. Owen Wynne, Helen's Welsh cousin, was vicar of Llanberris near Mount Snowdon. Born in this romantic region, he had, after thorough training at Bangor, served first as curate in this little town, and purchased to himself by good use of the minor office,



the higher degree of vicar, and since, dwelt peacefully with a maiden sister, amid his simple rural flock, apart from the strife and clamor of the great world, and in unwearied contemplation of nature in her grandest developments. So rarely had the good man, in a life now verging on threescore, emerged from his quiet home, that the bare idea of a journey, however short, was, as would have seemed to the tourist among Alpine glaciers, a voyage to the moon, and doubtless, to such an enterprising explorer, the colloquy between the quaint old couple might have elicited a smile, as they discussed the necessary preparation for the expedition to a half-way house, which he thought incumbent as a due welcome to such young guests travelling under no better escort than a female domestic. His time-honored, spacious portmanteau was disinterred from its deep recess in the lumber-closet and interspersed with infallible specifics for accidental injuries, bandages of sundry dimensions for possible fractures, medicated balsams and styptics and cough-syrups to counteract exposure, and an ancient valise pressed into service, to convey a soft Welsh blanket, pronounced by the affectionate spinster an indispensable precaution against the damp beds, always, in her imagination, the receptacle of the unwary pilgrim, provided by pitiless, mercenary landlords. At length, fully equipped, and with manifold charges to be watchful of prospective perils attending such an undertaking, the good vicar set forth, and despite all misgivings, safely arrived at M., and, as arranged in his letter, met our young orphans at a small inn, whose tidy appearance, well-aired beds, and dainty board spread with coffee, eggs, salmon-trout, etc.,

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might have inspired the incredulous Mrs. Rebecca herself with compunction for harsh judgment.

We may now picture a cheerful party around the supper-table at M. Janet, at the happiest of all ages, whose peregrinations had hitherto been only to and fro from Bournlee to Glasgow, now launched upon new and varying scenes, enraptured at the sight of objects whose charm consisted in their novelty alone to her unsophisticated eye, was once more redolent of smiles and roses, while Helen herself, not insensible to the pleasure of travel and variety, witnessed with fervent gratulation the ready working of her experiment, and wore a countenance of deep content and relief.

The kindly shepherd from the Vale of Llanberris was seated between them, his large heart full of benevolence as he thought of their lonely orphanage, and eyes swimming at the myriad of snares and trials his imagination evoked as the probable fate of their beauty and innocence in a wicked world, and inwardly resolving that he would himself enshrine them in his own Eden, shut out from the fearful temptations and corruptions of a sinful generation, and watch over their weal as a father and guardian, never presuming dissent on their part to a renunciation of a world which he unhesitatingly believed little better than the abode of the great dragon. Whatever their final decision as to a relinquishment of the sphere they had left, now, assuredly, they at once warmed to the type of goodness by their side.

Rev. Owen Wynne presented a tall figure, whose symmetry time had respected, mild, dark eyes and classic outline, mouth expressive of genuine good-will

and absence of everything malign whose smile lighted up the whole face with benevolence, and a crown of white hair, with beard of the same, perfecting the interest of a most attractive exterior. More than one of his ancestors had been distinguished chieftains in the army of Owen Glendower, and thus the good vicar inherited not only the appellation of the great captain, but unconsciously, from his ancestral lineage, the erect martial bearing which added dignity to his clerical mien. Not unfrequently, along his journey, might have been observed, in an encounter with some retired militaire, the hasty posture of regulations and habitual salute to the stately port of a general officer.

It was whispered that, in earlier days, while on a visit to Glasgow, Owen Wynne had seen and loved the mother of the fair sisters under his charge, without return. Certain is it that he opened his hospitable doors as a refuge to her friendless widowhood, but with like refusal, the pretty widow choosing rather the infliction of "hated" Glasgow, with its life, to the profound seclusion of a Welsh parsonage, to her mind a tomb-like solitude, only varied by the dirge of echoing cataract and waterfall. Thus was his interest in the daughters heightened by this never-forgotten sentiment, and the good vicar, with the snows of years on his head, whose warm heart still kept sacred the passion of his youth by admitting no successor into that hallowed corner, would often look, from one to the other of the sisters, to trace lineaments he still thought unequalled.

After a night of undisturbed repose, they next morning recommenced the rapid transit over the great

highway toward their destined haven. Modern locomotion admits small opportunity to lovers of scenery, and Helen, with all her efforts, could but catch a glimpse of bold crags, wooded valleys, and mountain-tops, as they winged swiftly past her. They entered North Wales from England, through the ancient City of Chester, still exhibiting to the curious the walled ramparts and strong gates of feudal times.

The Vale of Llangollen, along their route, is remarkable, even among the many charming valleys of Wales, not only for its picturesque situation and scenery, but for the kind of historic interest it has acquired as the residence of the "Ladies of Llangollen," Miss Ponsonby and Lady Eleanora Butler, who, in the flower of youth and beauty, withdrew from the world to this secluded spot. Their villa, called Plas Newydd, is still standing, and there they lived to a good age, never revisiting the world they had forsaken, proving thereby that while their strange resolution might have originated in romantic feeling, it was not the mere impulse of evanescent caprice.

Who, in this unsatisfying existence, has not experienced that thirst of the Psalmist, to "flee away and be at rest?" Distance seems to create an enchanted idea of rest, and the very imagination of a beautiful, retired valley, far, very far from the turmoil, the disappointments, the *unrest* of our daily life, fills the heart with a longing desire to lave our weary spirits in its promised peace. Oh, as Helen Erskine gazed at the boundless landscapes of mountain and valley, as if Nature had there employed her most ingenious mechanism to construct the boldest flights of

the picturesque and romantic, passing in rapid succession site after site of sweet, green, rural retreats, might she not be pardoned if a wish arose in her heart that her lot had been cast there instead of busy, matter-of-fact, uncongenial Glasgow?

Another day's travel, and through the Pass of Llanberris, and then the vicar, his young companions, and the staid Edith, attained their haven, as the sun was prolonging his last ray on the high Peak of Snowdon, that forms the southern boundary of the valley. The vicarage, standing on a gentle eminence, in keeping with the hills that dotted the surface, and surrounded with wild meadows for the sheep and other small flocks of the vicar, was of white granite, roofed with slate, ordinary in Welsh structures, large gables covered with lichen, irregular in outline, a deep, low porch, with stone benches in front, a broad walk of many-colored pebbles, between flower-beds just awaking from their wintry sleep to a resurrection of bloom and fragrance, through a gate overshadowed by a tall yew, while oak and ash with an occasional pine, stood apart within the hawthorn hedge, less luxuriant than that of milder England.

At the back of the house was a garden for vegetables and herbs, the latter equally essential in Mrs. Rebecca's category, and diligently subserved by the Lady Bountiful to the parish; an orchard, sweeping gradually to a stream, which in summer was a mere brook bubbling to the alders fringing its banks, but in winter, with the contributions of snow and rain from hill and mountain, assuming the dignity of a torrent, and within the orchard, a space for the row of spotless

hives, whose bees were watching the sweet harvest the blossoms would soon yield. There was no park for aristocratic antlers, nor glazed conservatory for exotic plants. Every inch of ground under Mrs. Rebecca's control was turned to profit. A pair of silky goats, an animal not common in Wales, were objects of affectionate care, and not by any means a useless appendage in the harsh winters, and poultry of divers kinds which well repaid the nurture bestowed.

For an hour previous to their arrival, there might have been discovered beneath the yew-tree, a venerable figure, with hand shading the eye, steadily fixed upon the highway, to see if any one was coming. Assured by quick but comprehensive glance of the identity of the imperilled vicar, in health and sound of limb, Mrs. Rebecca next lavished the heartiest of welcomes upon the young guests. Hospitality overflowed, and after a supper, on the daintiest of tables, of native salmon, white bread and coffee, and pure honey from the orchard-hives, the weary travellers were conducted to the pretty chamber prepared for them. Never was sleep sweeter than that of the orphan sisters in the lavender-scented bed of the old Welsh vicarage; even the white owl of Wales, hooting from the thicket, was unheard or served as a lullaby, till Mrs. Rebecca's chancicleers, in closer proximity, announced the dawn of day, and on the repose of all around sounded the footsteps of the mistress beginning the routine of domestic duties.

Helen Erskine awoke to the delightful realization of the contrast from the unceasing roll and clash of the noisy mart in which they had for months been im-

mured. The first object in the quaint apartment that met her eye, rising high and massive, like some old monument of a past century, was a chest of drawers, whose size and ponderous weight might have frowned upon the light trifles of later workmanship, its dark surface rivalling in polish the square mirror above, displaying, in boldest relief, the bright brass handles, with their wrought ornamentation. Sundry drawings, in water-colors, the fruits of Mrs. Rebecca's early genius, hung around, very Arcadian still, though faintly indicating their original hues.

On the south, a window gave a fine view of the mountain, the other, on the east, of the orchard and hills and knolls beyond. Helen's first impulse was to look out upon the magnificent panorama that had so excited her wonder and admiration the day previous.

She felt as if still amid the dreams of the night, in gazing upon Snowdon, and its craggy peak, Y-Wyddva, so famed in history as the last field of the brave and ill-fated Llewelyn of Griffith, and the retreat of Glendower and his wild bands from the army of Henry IV.; so celebrated in legendary romance as the theatre of the fabulous exploits of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Arthur and Merlin, Guinevere and Morgan, were as household words to Helen's childish ears, and there seemed enchantment in the actual presence of scenes hitherto known only in fairy lore. Y-Wyddva was still white with the winters' snows, and the picture was sublime above all that her imagination had ever conceived. The undulating valley at its majestic foot, lay sleeping securely beneath the shadow of that mighty bulwark, and with the

white houses at distances, interspersed with waving hills, some thickly wooded, others covered with gorse and whin-bushes, presented a landscape of diversified, rural beauty.

From the east window, there was the orchard with the bees, and the stream whose murmur at that early hour could be heard chiming with the hum from the hives, whose impatient tribes were eager for the morning feast ere the sun should dispel the dew that freshened the sweet blossoms. It needs not to dwell upon the pleasure the sight of an orchard affords in its first bloom. Nothing can surpass its fragrance and loveliness, and fain would we have the short-lived charm linger even at the cost of its luscious harvest.

There too, and worthy of mention in such company, was good Mrs. Rebecca, gown carefully tucked, and long apron with capacious pockets, the goats marching beside her, in the centre of a feathered multitude receiving their repast from a plentiful bowl in the hands of their patroness. A large dog sitting near by, scanning with disdainful mien the voracious cormorants before him, brought tears to Helen's eyes from his resemblance to faithful Bruce, and had well-nigh displaced the real picture by a memory of the loved and lamented Highlands and its familiar associations.

"Dear Helen," said a dreamy voice from the bed, "what a vision I have just had of our Bournlee! I thought myself in the poultry-yard there with Katrine as of old, and in my morning dishabille, striving vainly to elude my cousin, the young laird, who, wearing his usual calm, thoughtful expression, was passing that way to your arbor. Then, the scene changed to the



great avenue, and Bruce was vociferating a friendly welcome to Mr. Montrose of the Linn ambling up the broad path under the beech-trees on his shaggy pony. Oh, it was a bright dream!—but it is all gone.”

“I suspect, Janet,” replied the elder sister, “that the cackle and strife of the multifarious broods to which our good hostess is, at present, ministering below, constitutes the groundwork of your dream. As to the ornamental figures of your canvas, I suppose they emanate from the camera-obscura of memory, which so often mocks the brain with its imagery of a dead past. But now, dearest, we must endeavor to forget our old home and its vain reminiscences. Here, we have what you so pined for in Glasgow, a broad, free expanse, and nature in its highest forms of grandeur. Come, behold Snowdon, in other days a favorite theme in our histories and romance. You have not forgotten King Arthur and his benevolent enchanter, Merlin, to which you then so delighted to listen, tarrying, without constraint, for tales of Fairyland, though restive enough under the infliction of a lesson from Hume or Gibbon. This is the scene of their mighty deeds, and we may in fancy select the very spots the imagination of the poetic legend has denoted as the region of their wanderings. Here, again, is an orchard, less extensive, but not less pretty than that of Bournlee, and from its music this morning, I think the brook at the bottom of the slope will console you for the one whose rustic bridge you so often traversed in the gloaming returning from Glenshiels. I see, too, in the group beneath the window, another Bruce, who, on further acquaintance, may condescend to accompany you in the count-

less, prospective rambles over hill and dale, spreading on every side in such inviting numbers."

The family rooms were across the old-fashioned corridor that divided the house, and from thence the view once more presented a new aspect. From the cosy study of the vicar, the church was now clearly visible, though in the full leaf of summer, half buried in a copse, whose tall spire whiter by contrast with the green verdure, and, especially the clump of pines in the background, formed a point of attraction conspicuous above the straggling habitations of Llanberris.

To these freed captives of stone walls, the walks, attended by the hospitable vicar, were full of refreshment. Nor was it long ere the mossy hills and dells became familiar with the sight of Janet's slight form, as with Pym, Bruce's successor, for companion and protector, she explored each nook and recess, inducting the vicar himself into new worlds she discovered. Thus, in an atmosphere so pure and invigorating, added to Mrs. Rebecca's nutritious and tempting housewifery, she rapidly recovered her lost roses and smiles. The pensive Helen, too, exhibited more fulness of symmetry, her brow resumed its placidity, and a faint color on her cheek recalled the peach-blossom of the orchard.

In one of their sunset walks, the vicar pointed out the inn near the water-side, with its huge sycamore and benches in front, and around, the customary accessories for man and beast.

"Enjoy your free rambles while you may, my pretty lassie," he said to Janet. "Very soon there will be company at that hostelrie that will transform our quiet

Llanberris into a thoroughfare. Tourists resort hither in successive crowds, some to view the grand scenery, others, and by far the larger number of strangers that annually fill that inn to its utmost capacity, are disciples of Izaak Walton, anglers for the fine trout with which our lakes and rivers abound. Summer utterly metamorphoses our rugged land, whose repose is, in winter, disturbed only by the rushing torrent or cataract from Snowdon, to a lively, animated population of sportsmen in gay jackets armed with long rods. These sporting gentry, meanwhile, are more picturesque in the distance than on a near approach, in general experience. Few are to be found among our congregation of worshippers, if the Sunday gives fair promise of a good nibble, and fewer still, when present, acknowledge 'the Lord in His holy temple' by a reverent bearing."

It was not long ere the vicar's prediction was verified, and the free expeditions of the light-footed fairy consequently restricted, except beneath his paternal wing, to the boundaries of the vicarage. In vain did the cottagers along the slopes and hill-tops of the valley look out for the lithe, graceful figure; the blooming cheeks shaded by golden curls, and a broad hat with its blue streamers, for which they had daily watched as she skimmed fearlessly over brooks and into dingles with her canine guardian, seeking the straggling vine or hidden floweret blushing unseen amid the gorse and whin-bushes, with which she wreathed the crown of her broad brim, the crones, as usually seen in Wales, on their rude seat under the door-tree diligently plying the knitting-needle, or the more juvenile gazing with pleased curiosity at the

pretty young lady from the vicarage. Not unfrequently would the admiring peasant allure the happy wanderer within the clean cottage to partake the brown loaf and sweet milk of their simple fare. And again, was it a pretty contrast to behold the fair Highland girl, in her flowing muslin robe, sitting beside a grandame at the door, hearkening to a Welsh legend of Snowdon and its enchanters, or traditions of premonitory corpse-candles, or fabulous histories of Llewelyn and his wild followers, still, in popular belief, haunting the clefts and ridges of the dark mountain. To Janet, reared among Gaelic superstitions, brownies, and fairies, accustomed from childhood to auld wives' tales, these recitals were not unpleasing, and fell upon her ear as familiar sounds.

Now, however, during the reign of red-jackets, and long rods and tackle, she must, perforce, be content with the limits of the musical stream beyond the orchard, and watch its clear ripples transparently reflecting her innocent face in its waters. To Helen, it was happiness enough to breathe in this peaceful retirement where no harsh sound dispelled the repose; without, an ever-present sublimity to enchain the eye; within, the choice store that offered on the shelves of the vicar's study, the instructive converse of her host, and the motherly affection of the indefatigable Mrs. Rebecca, whose busy labors she delighted to aid as well as witness. Her heart, long harassed with care and perplexity, rested in this secluded, Welsh retreat, as a weary traveller acquiring by profound sleep fresh strength and resolution for the remaining journey. And

many a bold crag and water-fall from her pencil attested her proficiency and application.

Thus sped the days in this retirement, tranquil and peaceful as if massive Snowdon interposed its impregnable barrier to invasion from the great world with its multifarious strife and emulation, or even from its ordinary cares and troubles, and Helen Erskine was beginning to lend a willing ear to the vicar's proposed adoption, so far, at least, as to affix no definite period for return to the noisy habitation they had so gladly left behind. True, the solitude was almost profound, but where is solitude more sensible than in the heart of a thronging multitude of strange faces, neither loving nor loved? And where could they find sympathy so overflowing, affection so genuine, as in these kind hearts which had expanded so freely to garner in their orphanhood from the evil and sorrow of that wide world they had found so cheerless? In her happy elasticity Janet seemed to have well-nigh forgotten her Highland home; and if uprising thought in Helen's mind still retained a fadeless memory of Bournlee, and especially its last eventful year, the hues of its real imagery lighted no visions of a future there. In the sepulchre to which the past must necessarily be consigned was, apparently, buried all desire for the variety and excitement of life so natural and general at her age. If their present sojourn were so promising of happiness and peace, wherefore search farther for the boon, provided there be no conflict with duty?

The scale was certainly inclining to the side of Llanberris and its repose, but whether or no her cogitations would have culminated in such decision must remain

in doubt—circumstances intervened to change the current of ideas for a time and postpone the issue.

In a proposed expedition to an ascent of one of the minor cliffs of the great mountain, to view the sunrise gradually enkindling the different points of the valley, the two sisters, accompanied by the vicar, and the sturdy Pym close beside the young patroness to whom, in faithlessness well imitated from his superiors, he had transferred his prime affections from the grave and reverend master, emerged from the gate with its dark yew, at an early hour on a fine June morning, while the dews were still lingering in the flower-cup or broad leaf by the wayside. The mist was slowly rolling up the sides of Snowdon, large patches, like cloud-wreaths, lying here and there, as if to rest in the mighty task, as the pedestrians climbed the zigzag path to the natural observatory where they were to pause for the promised enjoyment. Nature was redolent of the freshness and fragrance of her first awakening, and silent, save the scream of the distant eagle from his eyrie on Y-Wyddva, or the notes of tiny birds in the copse, or low of cattle in the meadows, or the whistle of a laborer beginning his long diurnal toil, or step of a poor fisherman hastening to gather his spoil from the waters ere the red-jacket sportsman should have shaken off the languor of a late carouse.

And richly indeed did the fair scene stretched out before them repay the effort of their interrupted slumbers—they beheld the valley lighting up with measured pace, now gleaming adown the undulating hills, and now converting a lake into a sheet of sparkling silver; cascade and water-fall emptied glittering streams from

overhanging rocks into deep chasms, and white cottages, less inviting perchance on a near approach, looked tempting in the distance and the partial light, embowered in green. From their moderate elevation on the mountain-side, southward, they could discern some faint boundary lines extending the prospect beyond the valley, but from the lofty peak of Y-Wyddva,\* inaccessible to them, the view comprehends the Isle of Anglesea, Irish Channel, and a part of Cumberland.



No habitation presented a more picturesque appearance than the antiquated vicarage with its quaint old gables; and conspicuous from a wood coppice now in full summer foliage, darted upward the spire of the vicar's church, its gilt cross the first to greet the king of day and flashing illumined rays, as if to illustrate to all around the merciful emblem of salvation to man.

At length, the vicar, with mock alarm at Mrs. Rebecca's wrath at their protracted absence, to the detriment of her salmon-trout and omelet, gave the signal of finale, and the little party reluctantly descended the zigzag path on their return homeward.

Pym, in unwonted friskiness, doubtless in joyous anticipation of what he relished more than scenery,—the bountiful share apportioned him from the family board, —bounded forward with a bark and seductive whine to Janet, who, nothing loth, gambolled on with her favor-

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\* Y-Wyddva is nearly four thousand feet above the level of the sea, and is generally considered the highest point of South Britain. Snowdon was so called by the early English for its snowy appearance in winter, and Eyri by the Britons, because in olden time it abounded in Eagles.—*Berrow's "Wild Wales."*

ite, leaving the vicar and Helen to follow at a more dignified pace.

As they proceeded along the highway in gentle converse, hearing a singular sound of measured steps behind them, they turned, and beheld a kind of bier borne by four men, on which lay a form, wholly covered from head to foot, motionless either in death or from serious accident, only the outlines of the figure being visible. Three of the bearers were laborers of Llanberris, well known to the vicar, the fourth was a stranger of superior rank, young, and wearing a countenance of extreme grief. The vicar hastily questioned one of the cottagers, who replied, without stopping, that a gentleman had fallen from a cliff of the mountain. The stranger then, addressing Mr. Wynne with look and tone of agonized appeal, said,—

“I entreat you, sir, come with us and render aid, if indeed there yet be hope or even life.”

The good man instantly acceded, and giving Helen a charge to Mrs. Rebecca for a prompt despatch of bandages, styptics, and like necessities, left her to return alone, and, after a kind word to the afflicted stranger, preceded the sad procession in its hurried march, to forward preparation at the inn for its reception.

Helen no longer tarried by the way, but now fleet as Janet herself, soon stood, pale and breathless, before Mrs. Rebecca, with the vicar's message, and a detail of the dread picture they had encountered. Without a moment's delay the requisite packages were sent forward, not the styptics only being in readiness but also the bandages, to Helen's surprise, which her hostess explained by the fact of the frequent accidents among



tourists on the mountain, often bewildered in the sudden mists, or inexperienced amid the numberless windings that bordered chasms and rocks imminently perilous to the unwary venturing without a guide. "Her brother," she said, "in order to enlarge his limited sphere of benevolence, had procured initiation into the healing art, so frequently demanded in this land of mountain and crag, and proved a most valuable auxiliary to the surgeon of Llanberris." Their short meal concluded, the good Lady Bountiful repaired in person to the inn, bearing additional supplies of whatever her mind could conceive to alleviate the pain of the sufferer. In an hour, she returned alone, full of sadness.

"Oh, my dears," said she to the sisters, "there is no hope for the poor young gentleman, though life is not extinct. He was precipitated from a ledge to rocks below, and the contusions are chiefly on the head. I know the spot well—many a traveller has met his fate there, either death or fractured limbs. He can never see another sun. The surgeon is arrived, but Owen will not quit the unfortunate stranger while there is yet breath. His companion's anguish is heart-rending."

The day was waning, and still the vicar came not, and finally night threw its curtain over the world, when the household of the vicarage, perforce, retired to rest after long and fruitlessly awaiting the appearance of its master. Sleep came tardily to the eyelids of Helen Erskine, the bier and its melancholy burden was vividly present, and Mrs. Rebecca's details of the morning continued to sound in her ear as the wail of a funeral dirge. Towards day-dawn she fell into a

harassed slumber, with singular and painful dreams. Mingling Bournlee and Wales in her disturbed brain, she imagined herself near her arbor, on the edge of the valley, transformed into a dark chasm, and Hugh Bolton beside her, with stern and pallid brow, reproaching her for her pride and cruelty, and then, ere she could repel the charge, he had leaped into the yawning gulf and vanished from sight. Roused by the horrible sensation produced, she awoke, and finding it but a dream, again sought the balm of sleep. The scene changed, but was not less appalling. She saw opened the costly mausoleum at Bournlee constructed by the late laird from his thrifty coffers, and a long train silently passing down the great avenue, and the same bearers of the previous day conveying the covered bier to the waiting receptacle. Speechless, she sought by look the solution her tongue was powerless to solicit, but there was no answer vouchsafed her, till, suddenly, on the wind, came the "Lament of the Gael for his Chieftain."

"Oh, woe is the day for the House of Bournlee,  
The Last of her Lairds to the cold grave is wending," etc.

Unable to dispel the effects of the vision, she arose as the sun was beginning to penetrate her chamber, and, with an undefinable oppression on her spirits, quickly performed the duties of the toilette, and descended in search of her active hostess. She learned that the vicar was not yet returned, and that Mrs. Rebecca had just accepted Edith Laidlaw's proffered service of bringing a report from the inn. In a short time footsteps were heard rapidly approaching, and in

the next moment Edith burst into their presence, panting and wild with agitation, wringing her hands and weeping in uncontrollable distress.

"Oh, Miss Helen!" she cried, in broken accents, "ye dinna ken! Oh, that my eyes should ha' seen the sight!" Sobs impeded further utterance. Mrs. Rebecca at once conceiving some dreadful apprehension respecting her brother, grasped the writhing Scotch-woman by the arm, and exclaimed,—

"What is it? What has befallen him? Tell me the worst!"

"'Deed an' it's the worst!" again resumed Edith. "Oh, woe's the day that I should ha' lookit on him lyin' in his death-thraw. Wha would ha' thought it, the morn?"

Mrs. Rebecca, desperate with suspense and terror, was about to rush forth in search of the loved brother her excited imagination pictured foully murdered or expiring of sudden seizure of illness, when the next words of the incoherent woman, to a question of Helen's, arrested her purpose, and changed the tenor of her fears.

"'Deed, Miss Helen, an' it's Bournlee, his ain sel; it's the young laird lyin' yonder!—an' he sae weel-favored, sae kind to gentle and simple. I kent him in his bloody sark. But—oh, my bairn! my darlin'!"

Helen Erskine heard no more, her habitual self-control gave way under the shock of so abrupt a communication, and she fell into Edith Laidlaw's extended arms.

Janet, alarmed at the unusual bustle below, hastily sought the direction whence it proceeded, and entered

the room to behold her idolized sister lifeless on the sofa, and added her shrieks to the scene of dismay and confusion.

At length, partly revived by Mrs. Rebecca's sal volatile, and not less, perhaps, aroused by Janet's screams, Helen's eyes unclosed, and she started up, with the inquiry,—

“What is all this? Oh, now I remember!” But, turning to her Scotch attendant, she continued, “Edith, it cannot be. What would he do here on this mountain?”

“’Deed, my darlin’ Miss Helen, it’s his ain sel—the bonnie young laird, lyin’ white and dyin’ at yon inn. Oh, the day! the day!”

Janet’s ready tears flowed at the mournful recital; but no such relief came to the stricken soul of Helen Erskine. By strong effort she suppressed further outward demonstration till shielded in the privacy of her chamber from all human scrutiny, and thither she was supported, and, at her urgent request, left alone. Language is inadequate to depict her grief and anguish. Where now was pride? Of what profit her resolute independence and dignity of sacrifice? The shaft of death pierces the veil with which she would fain have shrouded, even from herself, her love for him who had, in burning words, tendered her the wealth of his noble heart, and been scornfully rejected, as if it were a thing of naught! In striking portraiture she saw him as in the past, in all the simple dignity of his manly rectitude, in the generous principle of a just purpose. She recalled his eloquent defence of his truth against her mother’s doubts, and melted into tears of profound

emotion at the memory of their last interview when he frankly laid his affection at her feet, and self-reproach became intolerable at the thought of that haughty repulse, so false to the real, living sentiment within her, in perfect consonance with the impassioned feeling that breathed in his every accent. In the stillness of that summer-time, during the protracted watch by the sick-couch, when only the quick respiration of its fading occupant broke the quietude, there was the silent eloquence of intercommunion, not the less real because unacknowledged and unspoken. Why should she have interpreted his words of devotion as a covert for *enforced pity* or *generous protection*? That expressive interest, so obvious to Mr. Montrose of the Linn, needed no translation to define to her, what woman ever knows instinctively, nor did her calm unconsciousness of mien deceive herself, however impenetrable to others.

But if, in life, reflection and regret contained no admissible antidote, if the Gordian knot could never be loosed by the hand that had wrought it, all possibility of elucidation was now to be irrevocably sealed by the mighty arbiter holding his dread court near by, an arbiter from whence there is no appeal, and she must bide the sentence in unconfessed, unavailing sorrow.

Thus passed the morning, and noon came with no ray of comfort to mitigate the gloom of suspense. In every sound, Helen imagined the step of the messenger coming to announce the inevitable end. Finally, there reached her ear the murmuring of the vicar's voice below, and her very breath seemed suspended at the

thought of the too probable tidings of which he was the bearer.

Throwing herself on her knees, her face buried in her hands, she awaited the dreaded communication.

A quick approach and Janet enters.

"Oh, Helen!" she cries through tears coursing down her pure cheek, "the vicar is returned at last, and says he has spoken and is conscious—he thinks there is hope."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

To a man of Hugh Bolton's mould and temperament, the love excited for Helen Erskine was no superficial, passing sensation or evanescence, destined to fade in the tumultuous ardor of a London routine. It was not a short-lived fancy easily uprooted by lack of return in a cold rejection. The sentiment partook of his characteristic energy, was deep, vital, and enduring. Pained to the quick by the repulse, and surprised at the conciseness of the terms in which it was conveyed, he entertained no suspicion of its instigating motive, and yielded, with the suffering of a bitter disappointment, to a sentence he simply conceived to be the result of his failure to create a sympathy in the passion that engrossed his own heart.

From the moment that he heard her repelling the bare supposition of patronage, in the words, "I could never be a pensioner, no, not if a king were the patron,"

she had forcibly struck his imagination ; when environed by difficulties, her self-reliance, and clear, firm decision commanded his admiring approval, and during the months of that long sojourn at Bournlee, day by day in continual interchange of thoughts, or in the intoxication of that recurring day-dream, while she sat guarding the fitful slumbers of her invalid mother, his eye, shaded from observation, traced but faintly the characters of the book before him, rapt in contemplation of the intellectual beauty that charmed him.

“How could I hope to win the love of a creature so incomparable, so superior?” he exclaimed as she left him after the summary dismissal in the arbor. “But,” he continued, “she cannot, at least, forbid me to love her—aye ! and while life lasts.”

Returned to London, he plunges with increased absorption into the intricacies of the profession he had adopted. To no mortal vision, nay, not to the tender mother, does he unbare his cherished secret—he breathes not aloud the loved name that occupies his mind with such mingled happiness and pain, the proud happiness of having loved a creature so noble, the pain of the ill-desert to which his modesty attributes his failure to attain so great a treasure.

But strive as he might to apply the resources of his mind to a full occupation of thought, and intent as he certainly was on the fulfilment of responsibility, a dominant memory relaxed not its grasp, and a shadow rested on the spirit once so cloudless and serene. The merry Welshman, accustomed to Hugh’s repose of manner so in contrast with his own, ever grave and reserved, heeded not the deeper shade on his brow nor

his increased taciturnity. At home, at the Manor, he permitted no selfish reveries to impair those dutiful ministrations of word and act to the fond mother whose very life was in his presence, but subjected every faculty of body and mind to her happiness and peace. To Mr. Stepney's penetration alone, the change in his loved pupil was manifest. He discerned it in his frequent abstractedness, a diminution of wonted enthusiasm for objects and pursuits that once attracted him, and a new embarrassment in discoursing upon his Highland domain, as if associated with painful recollections. Any attempt, however, to rally him or divine the source of this revolution inflicted such evident annoyance, as if probing a recent wound, that Mr. Stepney was forced to desist and await a voluntary confidence, his solicitude evincing itself in unobtrusive devices to wile the sadness that often blanched the cheek and darkened the candid brow before him. Spring came, but with it, no revival to the heart of the young Laird of Bournlee, till, wearied of London and its careless crowds, he acceded to the pressing solicitation of his friend, Pengreaves, whose prescribed term was about to close, to accompany him to his home at Carnarvon, and afterwards in a projected tour among the mountain crags of North Wales.

It was in making a descent of Snowdon from Llanberris, with no other guide than the volatile Welshman, that the accident occurred denoted in the preceding chapter, from which he miraculously escaped instant death. They had spent the day previous among its stupendous cliffs, viewing from one point to another the glorious extent of land and water spread out be-



fore them, when, returning later than prudence and experience would have dictated, they had nearly accomplished the difficult feat of descending, more hazardous, though less fatiguing than the ascent, there arose one of those impervious mists, of frequent, sudden occurrence in the mountains, completely immersing them in its obscurity, and rendering imperative a delay till daylight should indicate the lost path.

Wearied and chilled from the unwonted exposure, they seized the first glimmer of friendly dawn to recommence the tortuous descent. Only a few paces had been gained, when Hugh's unpractised foot slipped, and he was precipitated into a cavity of the mountain on a rocky bed, and there lay stunned and motionless. The dismayed Pengreaves, more expert from early habit, contrived to reach the plain, and there encountered the laborers, who procured the litter from a cottage near by, raised the still senseless traveller from the cavity, and officiated as bearers to the inn by the water-side.

Verily, the young Laird of Bournlee, lying pallid and unconscious, scarce breathing, and without motion, well seemed to the startled eye of Edith Laidlaw as on the borders of the spirit-land, and she recoiled in wild sorrow for the chief of a line she revered with her utmost national pride, a lament for the "bonnie young gentleman" who had soon disarmed the first prejudice at his fancied intrusion, and won their warm attachment by his gentle kindness and consideration.

The gleam of hope the vicar discerned was but faint and changeable, for many days flickering in the socket, as if on the point of expiring. Edith Laidlaw was

established as nurse, uniting for the office maturity of experience to unwearied sympathy and affection. So nearly had life been extinguished, that even, after a revival of consciousness, not enough of vitality seemed remaining for thought, and only the most feeble whisper constituted the medium of communication with those around him. Nothing could surpass the assiduity of the vicar, and to this, added to the good man's surgical knowledge, was Hugh Bolton indebted, under Providence, for his life. Nor was Mrs. Rebecca's zeal less untiring. She enacted, *con amore*, the maternal rôle, which distance and frail health rendered wholly impracticable to the loving mother.

One afternoon, when all within and without the inn seemed lulled by the summer heat, in the vicar's absence, while Pengreaves slumbered on a couch he occupied in the sick-room, as Edith Laidlaw sat watching the pale invalid of the bed, with an earnestness of anxiety impressed upon her honest face, he opened his eyes, and fixed them upon her with the first evident ray of recognition, and said, in scarce audible tones,—

"Where am I? Is it Edith Laidlaw I see beside me?"

Alarmed at the unusual exertion, she replied quickly,—

"'Deed is it, laird; but dinna speak more, the while, till the vicar comes."

"Where am I? Who is the vicar? How came you hither?" he inquired, bewildered.

"We are a' in Wales, laird; I came with Miss Helen and the bairn, Janet, from Glasgow, twa months syne."

"To this inn?" he asked tremulously.

"Na, na, we are at the vicar's; but I am here to care for you, puir lamb. And, now darlin'," she said hurriedly, "na more questins and answers, fearin' the vicar will amaist scold. What keeps him so lang awa'?"

Mr. Wynne's appearance opportunely brought the conversation to a close, for the invalid showed signs of agitation that would, doubtless, have been perilous if unchecked. Hugh, looking intently upon the venerable figure beside his bed, yielded readily to the soothing recommendation to perfect quiet, and after a satisfactory response to his inquiry for Pengreaves, again closed his eyes and relapsed into profound sleep.

The convalescence was slow but steadily progressive, till at length, to Edith's extreme delight, he exchanged his bed for the invalid chair, imported from the vicarage for his use. And who could have recognized our Welshman in the grave, subdued Pengreaves, manifesting such depth of feeling at his friend's danger, the most exclusive devotion, day and night, a careful, tender supporter to the tottering steps, the happiest of mortals when recovery was no longer doubtful? He had become a frequent visitor at the vicarage, where his lively sallies and joyous temper made him a welcome guest, and whence, on returning to the inn, he was most eagerly awaited, and the minutest detail of whatever occurred or was said listened to with a degree of interest whose source the narrator little surmised.

"Charming scheme, old fellow!" he exclaimed, on one of those returns,—*"Mrs. Rebecca has the most delicious den prepared for us, and you are to be trans-*

ported thither as soon as able. So, quick step, my boy ! (with a pigeon-wing as accompaniment). Let us shake off the dust from our feet, of this weary inn, which I am resolved to hate after your sufferings under its roof. Moreover, my soul is, verily, vexed within me at the sight of the successive swarms of red-jackets and long poles and tackle and flies and such paraphernalia as infest this hospice. On window-sill and table and bench not a hieroglyphic save the 'Complete Angler' old Izaak has left on record to attest his strolling propensities; or, as variety, 'Treatise on Proper Baits in Trout-fishing,' or, 'Salmoniana,' and such like. And oh, you happy old Hugh, to be blessed with two pretty cousins ! The rosy Janet, with her golden curls, is a perfect Hebe ; the other, I suspect, is too cold and stately for a giddy Welshman, but the younger sings all day, like a bird, and hates the gay jackets, who, she says, have made her prisoner within the vicarage-bounds since their advent."

It was with natural excitement of emotion that Hugh Bolton heard such an announcement. Once more beneath the same roof with Helen Erskine ! Impossible ! His first impulse was to decline the proffered hospitality, but on what pretext, refuse, ungraciously, such a request from those to whose care and succor he was so deeply indebted ?

"Pengreaves," said he, "have you written to my mother to-day ?"

"'Deed an' I have, laird, as saith the Highland Edith. The missive is on the highway to England, with a graphic sketch of a certain whilom barrister, luxuriously reclining in a chair of eider-down, the per-

sonification of an interesting invalid in robe-de-chambre and Byronic collar, his eyes fixed on the door in expectation of a major-domo bearing a *déjeuner à la fourchette* of broiled salmon from the lake, or bird from the forest——”

“Pshaw, Pen!” interrupted Hugh, smiling, “be rational a moment, and tell me what you wrote to relieve her anxious fears.”

“Verbatim et literatim, as I have repeated, most incredulous of mortals, barring the Byronic clause, which, *par parenthesis*, I consider the gem of the portrait. Apropos, the rosy Hebe asked me seriously this morning how many scars the accident would leave on your classic physiognomy. The Lady Helen, as she might be styled from her lofty bearing, thawed sufficiently at this important query to turn quickly and watch for my reply.”

“As I am certainly no Adonis in my best estate,” said Hugh, “I may be pardoned for a little gratulation, that such mementoes of the untoward occurrence are at least covered by the coming locks that begin to resume respectable dimensions, after the lopping process to which they were subjected.”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

WE have been dwelling, for a season, in a quiet, secluded spot of that corner of Great Britain so distinctive in its bold scenery, its wild nature, primeval in rugged majesty as if just awakened from the sleep of chaos, with its peculiar dialect, its simple tastes, and primitive customs, a land full of interest, but little known to the world at large, little visited save by sportsmen and tourists. Can antipodes be more entire than Wales and Italy,—the one abiding from creation in the immobility of stern grandeur; the sun, as if repelled by this unchanging sublimity, pale in its misty rays except for a brief summer-tide, in fine, like a grim chieftain, disdaining to doff his antique panoply for the harlequin garb of time in its evolutions,—the other, the very banquet-hall, where the king of day holds his court, and Flora, with untiring hand, weaves gorgeous tapestry of ever-blooming flowers, where the air is ever vocal with poetry and song, and art rivals nature in its fertility of genius?

With the same magic-carpet of Arabian story that still waits upon the writer of fiction, we transport our reader from rural, peaceful Llanberris, to the blaze of beauty in earth and sky, in nature and art, that has given Florence the cognomen of *La Bella*.

Lord Merindale bade adieu to the shores of England just as autumn had touched the outer leaves of his centenary woods. There seemed to him, as he

receded, step by step, from the ancient halls of his fathers, the sound in the air of a lament for their abandonment; the note of the familiar bird that had its summer nest beneath the eaves of his old castle or in the thick foliage or fragrant bowers, now, like himself, saying *farewell!* in its flight to warmer skies; all those many distant murmurs we know of, that fall upon the ear, as we lose sight of what we love and sigh to quit. The beautiful exotic, he had transplanted to his heart and home, blooming awhile in such brilliancy and expanding joy, was now withering before him, and no human skill availed to extract the noxious worm gnawing asunder the cords that bound her to earth.

"Travel, change of scene, change of air," said the perplexed faculty, and Lord Merindale hastened to obey, as the sole remaining hope. Despite her entreaty to abide in quiet retirement at Merindale, he, with Lady Isabel, the pale Lucia, and their train, left England, and journeying by slow stages, reached Nice, with purpose of testing its invigorating clime. But vainly did the blue Mediterranean roll its gentle waves in ever-varying pictures to charm to contemplation, vainly offer the balm of its healing breeze to renovate and restore. After the first feeble interest of novelty had flashed and faded, the languor of indifference returned in full vigor, and the dark eye drooped, as if refusing the happy light.

Allusion to Venice, the Brenta, the mountains of Friuli, so made her shrink and tremble, as to render those haunts of her earlier life forbidden ground; and from Nice the earl repaired to Florence, faintly hoping

that, in the multiform attractions of that fair region, some antidote might minister to the disease hitherto so inflexible to all remedial influence.

Lady Isabel was ever abounding in the sweetest offices of a loving heart, her blue eyes were softer than ever, her voice more touching in its melody, as she strove to give cheer and solace to the harassed mind, of whose embittered grief she was fully conscious.

The episode of the duel had never reached Miss Courtney's ear, nor did she know aught, in word or deed, of him she still believed a recreant lover, since the interview that had proved so decisive in its results. But the object of her idolatry, whom her warm imagination had clothed in colors rich as the glories of the sun at noon among the mosaics of her native Venice,—as a knight of chivalric romance, his vesture spotless, his truth and honor unsullied as an angel's,—even now, fallen from the high pedestal of her rapt fancy, was still loved with the ardent, absorbing passion of other days. Dead to her, she mourned him as the widow of that perfect model before it was shattered into dust. Resigning herself to the wishes of her anxious companions, she accompanied them, in intervals of partial revival, to the Pitti Gallery and the numerous churches of Florence, populated with the wondrous works of the most illustrious genius. The contemplation of these immortal *chefs-d'œuvre* infused itself into her nightly dreams, and again she lived amid the scenes of her happiest days, with the master-spirit that was ever the bold relief of her sleeping and waking visions,—in the gallery of the Brenta, with its



long array of Titians and Leonardos, or before the frescoes of St. Mark's in that fair "Cybele of the sea."

On one of these days emerging from the Baptistry, where even the listless Lucia had lingered to admire those bronze doors, said by Michael Angelo to be "worthy of paradise," as they advanced, she supported by the earl, with Lady Isabel on the other side, they met a figure so extraordinary as to rivet their attention, and they paused to gaze. It was a woman in the black serge of the order of Carmelites, her head and nearly the whole visage enveloped in veil of the same. Part of the face exposed to view wore the pallor of death, and the eyes, large, dark as night, shone in contrast like the sun in cavernous obscurity. The sudden issue of our party from the church appeared to startle the tall nun, and she turned her luminous eyes upon them for an instant, then, as if transfixed by the sight, she stopped, and extending her hand, grasped Miss Courtney's arm, and held her immovable till she had perused her features. The expression was a mingling of grief, despair, and painful remembrance, appalling to witness. Lord Merindale, astounded at so strange an incident, which he naturally supposed the act of a maniac, and fearing the effect upon his niece, hastily interposed with an effort to disengage her from the insane grasp, exclaiming in English, "Release your hold." The nun seeming to recover her consciousness, instantly obeyed, and crossing herself, gathered her long, black veil about her face, passed on, and was soon lost to sight.

The fragile invalid was not a little shaken by this remarkable apparition and adventure. She was with

difficulty placed, fainting, in the carriage, and conveyed rapidly homeward, relinquishing at once their preconceived plan of further observation.

A week rolled by and the circumstance faded from her mind, though there now and then rose to memory the expression of those lustrous eyes whose penetrating intensity had well-nigh pierced her soul.

It was on a day in October, while driving in the environs of Florence along the banks of the Arno, viewing the hills that girdle the city and the purple mountains beyond, that they were overtaken by a sudden storm engendered by the oppressive heat, accompanied by wind, vivid lightning, and bursts of thunder, reverberating with terrific fury. Naturally timid at such times, Miss Courtney, in her present state of nervous depression, was seized with irrepressible tremor alarming in its violence. Their condition was far from enviable—no habitation at hand, the storm increasing in vehemence, their danger was augmented by the restive terror of the horses, scarcely restrained by the coachman from dashing forward with fearful speed. Miss Courtney's agitation now becoming uncontrollable, the earl inquired of the outriders if no shelter could be discerned to which they might resort in such extremity? The reply was: "None nearer than the convent in the woods at some distance," whose Angelus they could hear through the crash and roar of the tempest. He gave orders to gain it quickly as possible. Arrived at the barred gates, they rang a peal which obtained a quick response. After some delay, the carriage was permitted to enter the court-yard, and they were ushered into the dim vestibule to await further per-

mission from the head of the institution, to whom the earl, supporting the trembling Lucia in his arms, sent a brief entreaty for immediate specifics and a suitable retirement for the invalid seeking refuge at their hands. It was, as the portress informed him, a Carmelite convent, and it was not long ere the Lady Superior obeyed the appeal in person. Of placid, melancholy brow and dignified mien, she at once testified a womanly sympathy for Miss Courtney, and assured Lord Merindale of a hospitable readiness to alleviate her suffering to the utmost.

"Desire Sister Laguna to attend me immediately," she said, in Italian, to a nun in waiting.

"By the vows of our order," she continued, turning to the earl, "we admit only our Confessor within the dormitories of the house. In a building separated by an archway, the Father will receive yourself and suite; and fear nothing for your daughters, who shall be sedulously attended, though not in your presence. This sister," pointing to the nun just entering in obedience to the summons, "like myself, speaks English, and will not fail to minister efficiently to their need."

Lucia, with closed eyes, saw no one, but to her uncle and Lady Isabel, the surprise was great on recognizing in the Sister Laguna the tall nun that had so startled them in front of the Baptistery. She too was struck by the rencontre, but habit of stringent discipline in the presence of the Lady Abbess enforced outer calmness; and receiving commands from her in their own tongue, she came forward to assist the exhausted Lucia to the chamber allotted, who, without once observing her, yielded unresistingly to the proffered service, and, after

traversing a long corridor, was, at length, placed upon a bed, on which she sunk as if too lifeless for thanks. It was not without painful curiosity that Lady Isabel watched the motions of the tall, cadaverous nun, and she resolutely retained her station beside her loved cousin in undefinable apprehension.

Miss Courtney continued to sleep long and profoundly, and the nun, by gesture, invited Lady Isabel to an adjoining dormitory for a like repose; but, despite her weariness, she declined, resolved not to abandon her defenceless cousin to the care of so strange a watcher. Finally, as if conceiving the cause of this persistent refusal to avail herself of needed rest, the nun, fixing her large, lustrous eyes upon her, said, in low tone, in somewhat broken English,—

“Do you fear to leave her with me?”

“Should I not?” replied Isabel in the same whisper, though rather startled by so sudden a divination of her thoughts. “Remember the scene in front of the Baptistery? Explain it to me.”

The nun did not reply for a few minutes, evincing extreme agitation, then, with effort answered,—

“I had seen her features before.”

“Where?”

“In the Friuli mountains—it was a miniature.”

“How came such a miniature in your possession?”

“It was not mine.”

“Whose, then, was it?”

“Wherefore question me thus? Have I not atoned for my sin?” replied the nun, with hollow voice, and beginning, with quivering lips, to tell her beads.

Lady Isabel witnessed this extraordinary emotion

with increasing conviction of a mystery connected in some inextricable way with her who still lay buried in the deep sleep of exhaustion, and resolved not to let go the clue she had gained. In still smothered accents she again resumed, and pointing to Lucia, said,—

“See you this pale sleeper? She is dying of a broken heart, caused by the revelation of circumstances that occurred in Italy a year or two since. Your agitation implies some mystery involving her, the solution of which may be of momentous import. In withholding any information you may possess, you will perhaps lessen the frail chance of prolonging her life—a life that now hangs upon a thread. Reveal what you know—tell me whose was the miniature, and why the sight of her in Florence so affected you?”

The pallor of the nun scarcely admitted any increase, but the stony rigidity of her features gave token of the terrible conflict raging within. At length, lifting her head, she suddenly asked,—

“Why is she thus? *She*, the favored of earth and heaven! Is she not a wife?”

“A wife!” exclaimed Isabel, amazed. “No; she is unmarried,—her name is English, but she is a Venetian. As I have told you, she is fast fading from earth, stricken by revelations with which her fate is indissolubly linked. Will you not endeavor to avert this sorrow by unravelling the mystery?”

Clasping a crucifix to her bosom and lifting her eyes in agony of prayer, the nun, with strenuous effort for composure, said,—

“One more struggle, one more fierce conflict with the flesh, and then!—Listen to my sad story in

which that beautiful but fatal miniature forms so important a part. In a wide valley near the foot of the Friuli mountains, my father, Pietro Morani, dwelt in the unbroken seclusion of that charming region, blessed with a modest competency, amid his vineyard and olive-gardens, without ambition for the tumultuous world whose roar reached not his retirement, happy and content with his two children and cherished partner. But earth has no retreat impenetrable to sorrow, and after long respite it came in the death of my brother, Guiseppe, who, with instinctive desire of his age and sex, went forth into the world, and seduced into a conspiracy of the Carbonari, fell a victim to Austrian retribution, suffering, first, protracted incarceration in Spielberg, and, after, its consequences in speedy death. My mother soon sunk beneath the blow, and my father, called to endure this double stroke, bowed his head to a life-long anguish of soul. He became a prey to settled despondency and gloom, rendering my constant endeavor to dispel it abortive, and it was not till after long persuasion that he yielded to my urgent desire to leave his retirement, and with me, repair to Rome for the Carnival. Except an occasional brief sojourn in Venice with a sister of my mother, I knew nothing of the great world, and emerging thus from the shadow of Friuli into the vortex of the Carnival, was no less than a translation into another sphere of existence. My father, even amid his listlessness and sorrow, was perforce diverted from his absorption by the natural delight and curiosity the spectacle excited in me. As, always, accompanied by him, I was, one day standing beside him, in a domino, near the

Corso, viewing the gay revellers passing in varied harlequin or picturesque costume in one continuous stream, when we were separated by the crowd and I was left alone. Losing sight of my protector, and apprehending the worst for us both, pressed on all sides by an excited rabble, my sensations may better be conceived than depicted and I shrieked aloud. But there was no room nor ear for other than the scenes of the hour, and I should have doubtless perished quickly but for the heroic interposition of an arm extended for my deliverance. Better it had not, alas !”

The tall nun again paused, overcome by emotion, and then resumed her narrative.

“A young nobleman, unmasked, but in partial costume in keeping with the occasion, hearing my cry, sprang from an open carriage, standing before me unable to advance for the multitude of vehicles in front, and learning the fact of my father’s disappearance, left me in charge of his attendants, and pressed through the living mass in his way, in search of him. Some time elapsed, to me a century of suspense, when he again appeared, supporting my father, bruised and bleeding, whom he had rescued from the wild crush of human beings surging onward like the sea in its course. Instantly transferring us to the still stationary carriage, ere our grateful lips could utter words of gratitude, and learning our address, he ordered the postilions to extricate, if possible, the entangled vehicle, and convey us home, himself accompanying us. I cannot dwell upon the period that succeeded. Our return was delayed by my father’s injuries, and our young deliverer, compassionating our forlorn condition, was unremitting.

in delicate attentions and sympathy. The Friuli mountains constituted an inexhaustible topic, and were not less dear to him than ourselves. He annually resorted to those shady retreats, and knew each leaf and nook of its wooded heights. I may not indulge in portraying the charms of his mind and person. Such themes befit not my solemn vows. Suffice it, that I loved him, and dreamed the bright delusion that he was not indifferent.

“ We parted, and he promised to visit us during the approaching summer at our home in the valley. The interval lingered heavily, but it passed, and I again beheld him and was content. Though often pensive and thoughtful, he was never unhappy, and I looked not into the future, but rested in the present. One memorable day, however, coming suddenly where he lay, half-reclining, beneath an arbor at noontide, I beheld him gazing at a miniature and saw him press it to his lips. My step was unheard, and I stood transfixed till the lineaments of the picture were stamped upon my brain with indelible impress. They were those before us, only more youthful and less developed. I had heard from himself that he was the sole representative of his ancient house, and I knew my fate. I glided from the spot, unobserved, and, in the solitude of my chamber, realized the certainty of my desolation and woe. Two days more, and he had returned to his villa on the Brenta. Pride and decorum restrained the demonstration of my feelings while he was present, but apathy and despair only awaited his departure to possess my soul and bring me to the verge of death. Apprehension of this result, for weeks menacing, dis-



may at the possibility of being left alone in the world, revived the fatal symptoms from which my father had partially recovered, and it was not long ere he slept in the sepulchre of those he had so deeply mourned. What now to my stricken heart was the flowery earth, the vintage gay with song, or the fair valley with our beautiful home beneath the shadow of the Friuli mountains? Alone, I could not abide there, and all their varied joy and beauty were covered with a funeral pall. At the kindly solicitation of the Abbess, in whose convent near by I had received instruction, I left the home of my infancy for the shelter of the cloister, and there, at times, frenzied with grief, or sunk in mute despair, was, for months, the object of the good Sisters' indulgent care and compassion. Finally, yielding to my aunt's imperative request and authority, as my nearest relative and guardian, I accompanied her to Venice. Urged by a longing I had not strength, mental or physical, to resist, I sought the abode of him who was still the centre of my every thought, once more to behold and bid him a final farewell. Again we stood face to face. Appalled at the ravages a short time had wrought, he discerned but too plainly, in my agitation and incoherent discourse, the secret of the change. Then did he first draw forth from its envied deposit near his heart the fatal miniature, and he told me of his betrothal to the beautiful original and his boundless love. It was wise, that no hope might remain to feed my passion, but the stroke was keen, and the iron entered into my soul. Wild with despair, I returned to Venice. Lady, the remainder of my story is with my Confessor. Spare me the narrative."

Isabel could not listen to such a recital without tears of sympathy, and for awhile did not reply. At length she said,—

“Gladly would I forbear to inflict further pain upon you ; but it is necessary to the full elucidation, so desirable, that I learn one or two things in connection. First, your name ?”

“Laura Morani.”

“Ah !” exclaimed Lady Isabel, “then you survived that fearful——”

“How knew you it ?” inquired the nun, an expression of horror overspreading her features.

“From the English messenger sent to the Brenta,” replied she.

Burying her convulsed face in her hands a moment, the nun resumed,—

“I was restored, that time might be vouchsafed for penitence and prayer. I summoned him when my last hour seemed at hand. He left me not till there was hope, and then,—then, supplying every need and best medical skill of Venice, he departed, and I saw him no more.”

“He was the Conte Stefano Amari ?” inquired Isabel.

The tall nun assented by a gesture, and asked, pointing to Lucia,—

“Why is she thus ? Why are they not united ?”

“My cousin believed him faithless,” was the answer.

“Faithless !” repeated the nun. “No, not an atom of love did he rob her of to bestow on me ! Let her doubt no more. Wherefore tread under foot that noble heart filled with her image ? No rival has ever

found there an instant's presence. Is it wise to trifle thus with a rich boon from heaven? Tell her my sad story. Withhold no longer from him the reward of his unbroken constancy, the fruition of his waiting hopes. For me, not many suns shall wax and wane, ere the grave shall bring the sleep and rest so sweet to the worn and weary spirit. Stefano loves me not; but he will not disdain a tear of pity, when he learns that the heart that loved him to the last beats no more upon earth."

She concluded, and Isabel, justly apprehensive of the effect the sudden appearance of the nun, associated in her mind with the rencontre in Florence, might produce on Miss Courtney if awaking, gently requested her to withdraw, and leave them alone. The tall nun divining the significance of this dismissal, quietly acquiesced. It was long ere the mingled emotions of pity for the melancholy fate to the details of which she had been listening, and gratulation at the unravelling of the mystery that preyed upon her cousin's life and peace, permitted oblivion of sleep; wearied nature finally overcame excitement of thought, and in the last hours of the night she reposed on the same bed, till aroused in the morning by the invalid herself inquiring in wonder the meaning of all around.

The nun appeared no more; but as they were about entering the carriage to return to Florence, a note was stealthily slipped in Lady Isabel's hand by some unseen person, and was by her as secretly deposited, till opportunity should offer of perusal. Such occurred not until within the privacy of her own chamber. She then read, eagerly, as follows:

"I depart at once for Venice. The clouds shall be dispelled, and they shall again be happy. For a last time must I seek his presence. Fear not, she shall be saved "

There was no signature, and none was needed.

This step relieved Isabel of all scruple and perplexity in regard to the *éclaircissement*, and it now only remained to devise expedients for revealing the truth to Miss Courtney, whose precarious state rendered the utmost prudence necessary.

It was two days after this occurrence that a gondola stopped in front of the Villa Amari, and a tall figure issued therefrom, whose trailing black robe bespoke a religious order. She slowly ascended the steps from the water, and, after short parley with the porter, entered the hall. It was Laura Morani, or Sister Laguna of the Carmelites, an appellation to remind her of the sin of attempted suicide. Steadily pursuing her way through the apartments, waving aside all interposition from the domestics in her path, she reached the library as by intuition, and stood before the amazed object of her search.

"Laura !" he exclaimed, rising, and requesting her to be seated.

"No, Signor Conte," she replied, her voice husky and trembling. "No; hurriedly have I sought you, and hurriedly must I depart,—the time presses. I come to roll back the cloud that has overshadowed the sky of your destiny. Remember you the hour, in days gone by, when, on a height of Friuli, we together watched the sun piercing the darkness of the horizon and illumining earth, the sparkling waves and far pin-

nacles of distant towers, till all creation seemed to dance and sing for joy? Take now your lute, Signor Stefano, for she who has hitherto been but a night-bird of ill-omen, comes as a dove with the olive of peace and goodness that well benefits triumphal strains."

"What means this rhapsody?" asked the bewildered noble.

"There are two hearts," she rejoined, "one in the bonds of love, severed by a fatal error. By my act were they sundered, and it behooves me to repair my unconscious fault. Stefano, waste not the hours. She whom you love, the fair betrothed of your youth, is swiftly passing from earth, and only your hand can stay her doom. She knows my story, and you are redeemed."

"My Lucia!" he said, starting up in intense alarm. "Have you seen her? Where is she, that I may fly to save her?"

"Two days since I was beside her. She is in Florence, near the Duomo—hasten, ere it be too late."

And with one lingering look at his agitated features, the tall Carmelite turned and vanished as she came.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

ON a low couch within a back drawing-room in Florence, opening to a garden still blooming with flowers of an Italian autumn, reclined the young Venetian, a week after the interview of the Villa on the Brenta. The silken lash still drooped, but there was the light of happiness in the dark eye it shaded. There was a faint color on the cheek, but it was not the hectic flush that betokened decline ; a furtive smile revisited the mouth to which it had long been a stranger, and there was no languor of indifference as if weary of earth and of life itself. The window to the floor, admitted the breeze with its fragrant breath, and in one hand she held flowers culled from the luxuriance without.

She was not alone,—near by was Conte Stefano. He was occupied in attentively considering the miniature which had had so momentous a bearing on their past history, and which had well-nigh reversed their future destinies. He was comparing its lineaments with those of the more developed original before him, and the blush had been enkindled by his avowed decision in favor of the latter.

"Who," said he, "does not choose rather the flower with its unfolding leaves than the bud in its compressed and timid reticence?"

"Nay," she replied, "you know nothing of our English moss-buds, which lose much of their beauty when blown into the full rose. Dear Merindale, with

all its wealth of native flowers and forced exotics, shows nothing more perfect. But in truth, Stefano, I shall ever hate that unfortunate miniature. Place it, I entreat, among your old archives, and let it sleep with the musty records of past generations."

"The sacrifice of a cherished treasure," he replied, "at least deserves large requital. With the fairer original in my possession, I might be content to resign the shadow,—till then, it were worse than ungracious to reject this little companion and solace of so many lonely hours."

"Oh, Stefano!" she rejoined, evading direct reply, "it will surprise you to find at Merindale a copy of one of your Raffaelles, so exact as to be well worthy of the great master himself. Presume not to think, signor," she continued, archly, "that we have not noble works of art in England as well as in our sunny land of inspiration and genius."

"England is, indeed, prolific of beauty and high imagination, but to the soil of Italy, power springs up distinct and indigenous, illustrated in its living specimens as in its emanations of genius, incomparable and unexcelled. But, tell me, cara mia, are not these long galleries of your castellated mansions decorated with exotics transplanted from our southern clime, equally with the jasmine from Catalonia and the tall oleander from Sicily?"

"Give due homage, Conte Amari," she said, "to the Lawrences and Knellers and Turners of my father's natal land of fog and mist. But I am not so bold as to enter the lists with a Venetian dilettante, whose associates from infancy have been Titian and Tinto retto."

"Under present influences, I might be easily unhorsed, were the tournament for the prize in art. Nature, in her living, breathing models, now fills my thoughts, and were my standard of excellence therein instituted the meed of contest, I should not fear to win golden spurs of victory."

We may not tarry over this picture of restored happiness, though the contemplation be in comparison, as the green landscape to the eye wearied with the sombre shades of misery and suspense. It was determined by her medical advisers that Miss Courtney should not exchange the genial southern atmosphere for the harsher gales of a northern sky, and notwithstanding the progressive improvement wrought by the elucidation of the dark mystery that had so stricken her, in body and soul, the earl decided to forego his desire to return, and carry out the prospective plan of a winter in Italy.

A few weeks have elapsed, and we find a wedding-party entering the Baptistery at Florence. Lady Isabel involuntarily cast a glance around, almost expecting to behold again the tall form of the Carmelite nun, with those lustrous eyes, barring their passage. But there was no one without or within to impede the ceremony, and the *Promessi Sposi* stand before the altar and pledge their eternal troth. For cavalier, Lady Isabel was attended by her countryman and *ci-devant* admirer, Hon. Everard Faulkner, summoned to the nuptials from the Eternal City. And now a hard trial awaits the gentle English lady, that overcasts the sky of her serene joy. She must part with her who had for years been a daily companion, a sister



in affection, and yield her to another. Nor was it without a gush of tears that the beautiful bride pressed her cousin in close, clinging embrace in departing for the shores of the Brenta.

And amid the happy realization or such a fruition, the bridegroom freely awarded a throb of sympathy, as at times a shade would cross the brow of his wife at the memory of those she had left for him, the indulgent, tender guardian and uncle, and the sweet sister, the ever-ready sharer of her sorrow and her joy.

Here we also bid adieu to our Venetians, and only in imagination follow them to those clustering vales, where they may at leisure revive the past, when together they roamed through the familiar scenes that might echo the story of the imperishable love that had grown with each recurring year of their lives, till entwined into their inmost being. Friuli still maintains its everlasting base, and often did they recall, winding along its graceful slopes, the gorgeous picture of the Italian Embassy, and the incidents of that eventful period of their history.

Lord Merindale left Florence at the same time for Rome. Everard Faulkner was still in their train, his fickle heart once more stimulated to seek an auspicious smile from the Lady Isabel, but in vain. If once her young fancy had been touched by his *empressement* and the accomplishments of mind and person he certainly possessed, the illusion was quickly dispelled, the charm long since broken, by the palpable, frequent evidences of instability and lack of purpose, so flagrantly manifested in the abandonment of the Knowlton

Borough for a tour of pleasure, an act impressed upon her mind by her father's positive and avowed reprehension. And had the handsome heir of Knowlton watched the changeful cheek of the earl's daughter, in a chance discussion of the great siege now at its height on the Black Sea, it would have, at least, excited a dawning suspicion that some special, individual interest was located beneath the walls of the strong fortress.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

HUGH BOLTON and his friend Pengreaves had been a month domiciled in the quaint old vicarage, and, though few traces of the serious accident that had befallen the former remained as excuse for lingering, yet, the day of their proposed departure was still postponed from week to week. Hard for them to quit such a Paradise of repose, such a haven of rest and affection, where sin and sorrow seemed shut out forever!

It was with irresistible emotion that the young Laird of Bournlee again found himself under the same roof with Helen Erskine, nor could she witness the proofs of severe suffering, in his weakness and pallor, and retain her wonted self-command. But to Hugh there appeared simply a benevolent sympathy in the feeling she evinced, and no hope sprung up in his heart of a deeper origin than a sentiment of pity. Good Mrs. Rebecca, better skilled in Welsh cheeses than genealogies, had told him of the agitation, even to faint-

ing, of his *cousin*, at the sudden announcement of his peril, and Hugh had therefore attributed to Janet this sensibility to his fate, and believed Helen simply affected thereby as toward an indifferent stranger.

We find our young party gathered in the porch at the front of the house one evening near sunset. There was still light on the lofty heights of Snowdon opposite, but darkness was slowly climbing the steep acclivities and would soon envelop the ponderous mass in the mantle of obscure night. Helen had laid aside the handiwork which had engaged her eyes and hands, and was watching with admiration unsated by familiarity, the striking effect of the light and shade, while her three companions were busy preparing wild flowers for a preliminary process of a herbal; Janet, in the centre, on a rustic seat, a little table before her, loaded with the spoils of a long ramble, while around lay the fragments of rejected leaves and petals. Her hat had been cast aside, and the golden curls, stirred by the south wind, that would, each moment, cover her face as a veil, were as often shaken back with impatient gesture as intruders into the occupation of the hour. Pengreaves was chief speaker, and Janet's merry laugh amply repaid his effort to entertain her with the peculiar inflections of the Welsh dialect and singular traditions of their old bards and harpers.

"Respecting your Highland Fairydom, Miss Janet," said he, "they seem to me in no respect comparable to our Tylwith Teg, whose exploits recall the genii of Arabian Nights. What do your diminutive brownies accomplish, except petty mischief and malicious devices?"

"They have, at least," replied she, "a more euphonious appellation than 'Tylwith Tegs,' with their 'Corpse Candles.' Nor are our elfins and brownies all malignant, as witnessed by the high poetic authority of the Ettrick Shepherd."

"I cry you mercy, fair lady," was the quizzical rejoinder. "I supposed your research into the fruitful fields of magic would perchance furnish, as example, the heroic feats of Cinderella's godmother, and was just polishing my weapons against such a formidable illustration of your argument. Know you, meanwhile, that, not far from Bangor, is the Fairies' Well, renowned for its pellucid, aqueous draughts? Is there in the bleak Highlands a fount worthy a name so poetic?"

"To every well or fountain in 'Caledonia wild,'" said Helen, coming to Janet's rescue, "there is a legend or historic tradition attached, and in this department of romance you know the name is legion in our land. An appellation is easily bestowed, but when to all, is united a Border tale or magic virtue, the association rises to the dignity of true poetry."

"If romantic titles impress you so profoundly, Pengreaves," said Hugh, "what have you in wild Wales so mellifluous as fair Rosamond's Well, at Woodstock in England?"

"Oh," said Janet, laughing, "the Well of Tylwith Teg is, in his esteem, doubtless, more musical to the ear; but, come, old Pym," she continued, turning to her devoted servitor, ever by her side, "here is a long vine from a Welsh upland, better suited to your faithful neck than a herbal."

"Fair play, Bolton!" remonstrated his friend; "these

gentle antagonists need not your championship. Prythee, gallant chieftain, let thy lance lie in rest."

"By your favor, Sir Knight," replied Hugh, "I will quote a few lines of Sprague's, as apropos to this embryo herbarium,—

"Ye dry and dead remains,  
Poor wrinkled remnants of a beauteous prime!  
Why, from your final doom, should I take pains  
To stay the hand of Time?

"Not beautiful, but dear,  
Your wrecks recall to me the happy past;  
Wand-like, your stems can summon to appear  
The days that could not last.

"The friend, who, in those years,  
Shared warmly in my rambles far and wide,  
Back, with the same old fondness reappears,  
And trudges by my side.'"

"That's you, trusty Pym!" exclaimed Janet, with a pat on the shaggy head awaiting a caress. "Many and long were the rambles in which you 'trudged by my side,' till the invasion of red-jackets and tourists, over lake and mountain."

She glanced archly at the two gallants engaged in assorting the fresh, earthy leaves, and then quickly resumed, addressing Hugh,—

"Cousin, may I advise that you be furnished with a more experienced guide than your venerable cicerone, now in presence, when next you propose to scale those awful heights?" pointing to Snowdon. "Or does the modern Guide-book lead to the interior of chasms? Such explorations may be the march of research into matter. Who can tell?"

"How now?" said a familiar voice at the gate under the broad yew, "the old feud between Scotia and Wales still raging!"

The vicar appeared on the pebbled walk, and playfully seizing one of Janet's curls, continued,—

"How fares the battle, my little Scotch thistle, eh?"

"Oh, Uncle Owen," she replied, "as usual,—victory has crowned me with laurels, and I have bestowed the garland on my doughty esquire, Pym."

"You know, sir," interposed her opponent, "valor ever compassionates weakness, and strikes gently the shield of an unequal combatant. It is not befitting that one, sworn to the order of chivalry, should put forth his full prowess in a shock of war against a lady's palfrey."

"And how fares the Lady Helen?" the vicar inquired, seating himself wearily on the stone bench beside her "As calm and dispassionate arbiter in the passage at arms?"

"Not so," she replied; "my mind has rather been absorbed in contemplation of that mighty mass now frowning upon us in the twilight,—though, ever and anon, the words 'Tylwith Teg' and 'brownie,' would reach my ear from the respective champions. Laird," she said, turning to Hugh, "has not the resemblance struck you of the mountain-line along the Valley of Bournlee to the farthest ridge of Snowdon at this hour?"

"As viewed from your arbor, yes," was the response, coloring as he spoke, and as always when she

thus addressed him. Nor was a sympathetic flush in her own face lacking at the words "your arbor."

"Pray, Miss Janet," asked her indefatigable tormentor, "had every one an *arbor* at your favorite Bournlee?"

"Oh, no," she replied, with a sigh; "only Helen,—and it was beautiful! We often weep at the recollection of it. At least, I do,—and Helen's eyes are bedewed." Her own blue eyes glittered as she spoke, though a smile was on her lip.

"Cousin," she said to Hugh, "I trust, in your absence, it has not been left to neglect and desertion!"

"Far from it," he answered. "When there, it is my chosen resort, and under strict injunction, carefully preserved against intrusion or decay in my absence. There is not upon earth a spot so dear to me."

"Heyday!" exclaimed Pengreaves, "unwonted heroics in a staid barrister! To that aforesaid arbor, I suspect, there hangs a tale. As bearing your baptismal appellation, Miss Erskine, I appeal to you for satisfaction to my curiosity on the subject. Have all the Highland bowers a legend and historic tradition, like the wells and founts lately under discussion?"

With embarrassment, that could not wholly be hidden by her ordinary self-restraint, she replied,—

"Not this one, certainly. It was constructed for me by my step-father, the late laird, who also gave it my name. It is remarkable for the picturesque beauty of its situation, and an enchanting prospect of commanding extent. Thus it cannot fail to be an attractive resort."

Just then, to Helen's relief, Mrs. Rebecca sum-

moned them to salmon and honey, and the discourse, fast becoming significant and personal, was interrupted.

At length the day of departure for England was resolutely fixed,—more inflexible than even the laws of Medes and Persians, the gay Welshman pronounced their decision.

“Why should I tarry longer?” said Hugh to himself. “She is unchanged, and I cannot brook a second scornful rejection.”

Entering his apartment on the day previous to their intended departure, he found Edith Laidlaw adjusting his packages.

“An what will become of Miss Helen and the bairn Janet,” as she still called her younger nursling, “when you and the blithe gentleman are a’ awa’? They will pine and fret with none but the vicar and Mrs. Rebecca for company.”

“Not Miss Erskine!” replied Hugh, bitterly. “She will neither pine nor fret, as you call it, Edith.”

“’Deed, laird,” she rejoined, “for a’ that, she was in a dead faint when I tauld her of its bein’ your ain sel that was taken up out of the dreadful pit, and could na’ speak a word.”

“Who was it that fainted? Mrs. Rebecca said it was my cousin,” asked Hugh, in surprise.

“She calls them both your cousins,” answered Edith. “The puir lamb screamed outright when she saw Miss Helen lyin’ like a corpse, and she cried and wailed enou’ for you on hearing the news. But it was Miss Erskine that swooned off, as I tellit you.



And when she opened her eyes again, she said, 'It cannot be, Edith; what would he do here in these mountains?' and then, white as a ghast, she tottered to her ain room, and came no mair down the day."

"Pen," said Hugh, an hour after, "I incline to a further procrastination. What think you?"

"Ha! what's in the wind now, old boy?" answered the astonished Welshman. "But I am ever the most willing of your subjects to command. We will postpone by all means. In such a case, procrastination is honest, and no 'thief of time,' as Dr. Young pronounces. I have a controversy in store for the lassie of the golden locks."

"Remember that I am the head of the Clan Bournlee, Pen," said Hugh. "I begin to surmise that my young Cousin Janet's golden curls are like edged tools to your heart, dangerous to sport with."

"I confess, most discerning Hugh," he replied, somewhat confused, "that the temptation is oftentimes strong within me to lop off one for a treasure, when we are far away among our Dryasdusts and Folios. But tell me the cause of this change of purpose, an hour since so fixed and immovable."

"A truce with questions, my trusty coadjutor," replied Bolton, almost gaily. "We remain,—that is decided. Look to your weapons of defence in the next tilt with the golden-haired."

The following day, the young party were wandering by the brook beneath the thick shade of the overhanging alders, Pengreaves and Janet in animated dispute on some topic, and Pym varying the scene by an occasional dive for the stones or tufts of grass thrown

into the water, in return bountifully besprinkling the light garment of his indulgent mistress.

Hugh ventured a closer proximity than ever before to Helen, and began a quiet discourse, little according with his true sensations.

"My friend, Pengreaves, expresses a wish to visit the Highlands, which Janet has so warmly eulogized, before we finally separate and he returns to Carnarvon. I have made a long absenteeism, and notwithstanding an impelling desire to embrace my mother, duty seems to beckon me to Bournlee. There are two friends of yours there, Miss Erskine. Will you honor me as bearer of despatches and tokens for Mr. Montrose of the Linn, and your dumb protégé, Bruce, the often envied object of your caresses?"

"I had a missive from my kind Laird of the Linn yesterday," replied Helen, "and thank you for the occasion of sending more remembrances than a letter would contain. He tells me of Bruce, and protests against our design of expatriation, as he terms the plan of abiding in future under the paternal wing of our excellent host, instead of again resuming the close quarters of noisy Glasgow, so distasteful and nearly fatal to Janet."

"A protest that others will likewise echo. I, too, enter a remonstrance, Miss Erskine, and present a petition of momentous import to me. Is there no hope of reversal of the decisive sentence I received at our last meeting in the green arbor? To learn this, Helen, have I lingered another day. Will you, a second time, send me forth in misery and disappointment that you only can remove? But one word, Helen, ere I depart forever."

No sound issued from the lips of Helen Erskine, but the silence was eloquent, and language could add little to its expressiveness. Hugh Bolton saw, through the quivering light penetrating the green alders above their heads, the calm repose of features had changed into deep sensibility, and was conscious of a unison that needed no interpreter.

The coveted prize was at last attained, and in rapt stillness he indulged the joy of happy love, than which earth has no greater.

"Heigh-ho!" exclaimed the Welshman, approaching them, "never was this scene fairer than now when we must bid it farewell. Bolton, pity the sorrows of a poor young man, and drag me not hence to the fens and moors of the desolate Highlands."

"Well said, my friend," responded Hugh, "there is a special charm in this delightful spot to-day. To me it wears the aspect of Paradise. My reluctance to quit it increases every moment."

"Then, my good, my best of Hughs, why excruciate our hearts by an enforced adieu?" he said, eagerly.

"There is a remedy at hand, Mr. Welshman," said Janet. "Only imagine this rivulet a Lethe, and the past, with its peace and war, its mountain and streamlet, will subside into the gulf of oblivion."

"If the modern mythology would so develop the properties of this magical Lethe, as to render the oblivion partial only," said Pengreaves, "extending to scenes and memories we desire to forget, it would, if true, be a blessing to mankind; but to so sweeping a blotting out I object. This has been the happiest

summer of my life, barring your accident, Hugh, and is indelibly engraven on my heart of hearts. No, no, Miss Janet, no Lethe for me,—even your thrusts at this most glorious of lands I would not expunge, albeit they be tares among the wheat.”

Hugh found opportunity to learn from Helen Erskine the confirmation of his hopes, and the candid admission of how deeply involved was her own happiness in the explanation that had occurred. Nor did she withhold the confession of her regret and insincerity during the interview in the arbor, nor the narrative of Janet that produced the haughty mien she exhibited. Hugh then gave a full revelation of the conversation with her dying mother, only partially heard by Janet, and misconceived in meaning. In response to the maternal appeal to him, as the heir and head of the house of Bournlee, for protection to her orphan daughters if need required, Hugh acknowledged his love for Helen, and solicited her approbation of his purpose to win a return of his passion. This she at once accorded, expressing a hope of his success, with admission of the relief it would afford her last hours to know so desirable a result.

“My dearest Helen,” he inquired, “how could you for a moment harbor such an idea? Could aught but happiness find entrance into my breast at present, I might well feel angry at the injury to your noble dignity. You the subject of pity!—you, Helen Erskine, for whom my soaring love could never imagine a fitting shrine, while every thought was how to render myself worthy your esteem, accounting it my highest need!”

With ingenuous frankness she admitted her fault, and confessed her besetting sin, *pride*, which she had construed into proper independence, under their peculiar relations.

"But," she said, looking askance at the face watching her lively emotion, "I have suffered for my folly, and not the less, that it was untold, while my heart was devouring itself in silence. When, however, they spoke to me of your danger, then nature asserted her right, and there would have been no longer a possibility of concealment had the witnesses of my grief been less artless or less obtuse."

"Shall I be bold and, in this hour of purest gratitude, ask atonement?" said Hugh, in a tone deepened by earnestness of the request on his lips. "Will you consent to redeem the time that is past, to atone for the misery of a year, by accompanying me at once to Scotland? The autumn will soon be in perfect beauty, and your arbor awaits its mistress. Duty demands my presence at Bournlee, and yet, how can I leave you? Helen, must I depart alone?"

"So soon," she murmured, blushing at his urgency; "I must consult my kind, adopted father."

"Will you, then, abide by his decision?" he asked.

"Perhaps—I cannot say—it is so sudden," was the confused reply.

The lovers entered the vicar's study together, to the unfeigned surprise of its occupant, and knelt before him for his blessing. It was enough, and the cordial benediction was not withheld. Hugh's wishes, however, for so speedy a consummation yielded to Helen's reluctance, and the two friends at last set out, unwill-

ingly, for a month's absence, at the end of which the marriage was to take place. They, now, seemed to have exchanged temperaments, these two friends, Hugh exuberant with joy in his happy future, and Pengreaves unusually sober and thoughtful.

"Come, friend of my soul," said Hugh, after observing this strange mood, "make a clean breast of it,—golden locks, perchance, floating through your dazzled imagination, or the lack of a fair combatant to sharpen your wit. Confess, man, confess."

"Forbear, you enviable mortal, to taunt me with my sad fate," he replied.

"Why not buckle on your armor gallantly and enter the lists?" inquired his companion. "Faint heart wins not the scarf of love. Hereby, I tender my royal consent as chief of the clan."

"How should a briefless barrister aspire to so fair a Hebe?" responded the Welshman. "It were worse than presumptuous."

"*N'importe!*" said Hugh; "I bid you try and prosper in the suit. If you can win her heart, leave the rest to me."

Pengreaves embraced his consoler in the rapture of his hopes, and thenceforth they united in counting the hours that must intervene till their return to the rural village of Llanberris at the foot of Snowdon. Time moves steadily onward, though to impatient lovers it often seems to stand still, and once more the two friends pass beneath the tall yew and enter the old vicarage.

The next day, as Helen sat meditating in the quietude of her chamber, she heard a soft step, and turning,

saw Janet, her whole visage flushed to crimson and wearing an expression unlike herself. Drawing a cushion beside her sister, she silently hid the blushing face in her lap.

"What is the matter, darling?" asked Helen.

"Oh, Helen!" she exclaimed, "such a strange thing! Mr. Pengreaves—— but how can I tell you?"

The elder sister, laughing, lifted the bowed head, and kissing her brow, said,—

"Ah! has the adversary been transformed into a lover? Tell me all about it, dearest, I must know."

By snatches, she drew from the artless maiden the acknowledgment that her former opponent had vowed eternal devotion, and that she had run away without responding to his effusion. A knock at the door summons Helen to the study. She found there the vicar and the young inamorato. He solicited her consent to his suit, if Janet could be won.

"I only ask your approval of my intention to propitiate your sister's favor, Miss Erskine," he said, now no longer comic, but profoundly serious. "She fled from me, at the bare allusion, like a frightened lap-wing; but I will not despair, unless discouraged by her three guardians."

With concurrence of the vicar, Helen agreed to the prosecution of his suit, the consummation to be deferred, if success were the issue, until Janet should attain more mature years. The interview ended, and Pengreaves was comforted by the reflection that he was not rejected by authority, and might at least look hopefully to the future.

In the vicar's modest church, Helen Erskine plighted

her faith to the young Laird of Bournlee, Janet and her admiring suitor acting as loving attendants by their side. The vicarage was still and lonely that day, and Pym, like his prototype Bruce, wandered, disconsolate, in search of the soft hand so often extended to caress his willing head.

The gates of Bournlee open wide to receive the fair inmates of other days, and at the hall-door stands Mr. Montrose of the Linn, with Bruce by his side, ready to welcome them home. Helen saw, in addition to familiar objects of attachment, graceful decorations and rich contributions, attesting the young laird's wish to gratify her taste. The starling had come back from Glasgow with unabated hatred, and called out to Helen from the old perch in the family room.

It was again at the hour of sunset that they repair to Helen's arbor. The birds had tarried to celebrate the occasion, ere winging their flight to warmer skies, and the mountain-line, still tinged with the sinking rays, illumined the landscape of early autumn. All was beautiful to the eye, and their hearts rose in thankfulness for the full cup of blessing vouchsafed them upon earth.

A few more days and the circle is broken. Pengreaves departs for his native Carnarvon, and the rest for England, to the Manor where Helen was to find the fond mother, eager to press to her bosom the welcome daughter who was to share the love hitherto concentrated on the good, the ever-dutiful, the idolized son.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

It was during the succeeding winter that we find Lord Merindale again at his house in London, in the drawing-room in which the noble owner had been lulled into a sweet oblivion of pain by the melodious *buona notte* of one recently transplanted to her natal shores, and yet fondly remembered and regretted by the household wherein she had been cherished as a daughter. He had without reluctance returned to England, the more inclined thereto by the summons to receive his son on his return from the Crimea.

The great siege was ended, and the mighty fortress, after indomitable resistance to the combined assaults of the allied armies, had at length succumbed, and sword and shield were once more laid to rest.

The earl was intently listening to details from his son, who had been an actor in the memorable drama. The heir of his ancient house had returned with life, but not unscathed amid the fiery conflict,—he had received a severe wound, and bore evidence of suffering likely to leave enduring traces. The ordeal, however, had not been devoid of purification. The gay, young gallant, hitherto deeming a life of pleasure the hereditary prerogative of his rank and fortune, had, by this solemn initiation into peremptory employment of mind and body, learned new ideas of responsibility and duty, and in the future, there is ground to expect, from the lesson, worthier fruits than the waste of idle hours or

days of self-indulgence, whose record, forget as he may their stereotyped history, is imperishable.

Our old acquaintance, Mr. Stanmore, himself again, and rendered most placable toward his antagonist of the Brenta by the extenuating representations of Lord Merindale, was likewise an interested auditor beside Lord Egmont's sofa, now and then exciting a laugh by comments characteristic of his humor.

There were, moreover, in the drawing-room, apart from the circle about the sofa, two persons not less absorbed in conversation, only a murmur of which gave token of their presence. Sir Ashleigh Harcourt had accompanied his friend back to England, and was now engaged in a discourse, mingling imagery of hair-breadth escapes and dangers past with the not less vivid delineations of his impatience to resume his present post of contemplation and communion. His auditress was the Lady Isabel, the object of his true and leal homage, a modest but not ungracious listener to heroic recital and words of expressive significance her heart so well understood. We shall not interpret its language.

Sir Ashleigh had submitted to the father's decreed probation, and now aspires to the coveted reward of his long waiting. The valley-lily shrinks within the enfolding leaf, but there is no repulse in word or look, and well may the lover be content to abide his time with so sweet a prize in view as the recompense of his constancy. Not like the quiet nuptials at the Baptistry of Florence, nor the unpretending troth plighted within the vicar's little church under the shadow of Snowdon, will be this ceremonial, we foresee, ere many months

shall roll their course. With all her retiring grace—the earl's daughter cannot elude the pomp and circumstance of special license and gorgeous array of point lace and diamond cestus, the glitter of courtly rank and rich equipage. Let us hope, meanwhile, that the lily of Merindale will pass amid its glare and artificial heat unsullied in her gentle purity, her fragrant charities still serene and unimpaired.

Lord Egmont now silent from weakness and exhaustion, the earl and Mr. Stanmore left him to repose, and entered on a different topic.

“Was not Faulkner in your suite, my lord,” said the latter, “or is he still in Italy?”

“He returned with us to England,” replied the earl, “and is for the present at Knowlton, full of plans and high resolves, whether destined to wither in the bud, or ripen into maturity, time only can prove.”

“Is the borough included in these plans?” asked the member.

“Scarcely,” was the answer. “The electors are far too indignant at his dereliction to tolerate the proposition. And justly, for the case was flagrant enough to render pardon impossible. As the representative of the old family, he was enthusiastically welcomed, and would have been chosen beyond doubt; but lo! at the height of the canvass, when too late to obtain another candidate, my young gentleman throws up the game, deserts his constituents for a tour of pleasure, and the election goes by default into the hands of the Opposition. Imagine their rage and disappointment, and not to be wondered at! I was, as the friend of his father, profoundly incensed at such levity. Everard Faulkner

has fine parts, but of what avail if continually frittered away in the mere follies and pleasures of life? Leaving aside corrupt, vicious propensities," continued the earl, "to which I believe him by no means addicted, it is my opinion, from observation and study of human nature, that there exists no more formidable impediment to success and the attainment of true worth and dignity in life, than this very lack of stable purpose and a powerlessness against self-indulgence, whether of ease or pleasure, at the expense of duty. In Everard Faulkner this vital defect gained the mastery early, while deprived of the oversight parents alone can bestow, and being bountifully provided, as a rich heir, with opportunities of gratifying his fickle desires as soon as formed, it has become lamentably rooted."

"As regards the matter of the borough," said Mr. Stanmore, "your lordship would permit an option?"

"Unquestionably, had he decided not to stand in due time and season, there could have been no constraint upon his will. On the other hand, he inherits, from long descent, not only the broad domains of his ancestors, but with them, a large tenantry, whom his constant absenteeism condemns to supervision of stewards and the watchful cares of his mother, frail in health, and of too many years to be made the deputy of so onerous a charge, to say nothing of the duty he owes her in presence and affection. No, my friend, inheritance, however great, gifts of fortune however splendid, can never obviate exertion, or justify the whole employment of life in the pursuit of pleasure, even if in itself lawful."

"*Duty*, on which your lordship dwells with such

emphasis, was the watchword of Hugh Bolton, and reminds me of a rencontre with him a few weeks since," said the member.

"Ha!" exclaimed the earl, "my young friend and supporter! Tell me of him."

"I met him en route to his chambers, enacting the rôle of a prop, as in your lordship's case. Mr. Stepney, whom I knew in Italy at the same time, was leaning on his arm, and Hugh corrected my salutation to this reverend gentleman of the cloth, by announcing him as archdeacon. On questioning Bolton as to his past and present motions, he laughingly replied, 'Many and diverse have they been.' Then, raising a forelock, he exhibited a scar, saying, in the first place, he had been engaged, for a brief period, with lasting consequences, in rolling down Snowdon, which sublime feat, it must be allowed, hath small merit, save originality of execution; and again, when recovered from the experiment, he had taken a lover's leap, and was now the happiest of Benedicts."

"Married!" exclaimed the earl.

"Yea, verily, quoth he," replied Mr. Stanmore; "to wit, that said Benedict did invite me to a contemplation of his connubial bliss, by a visit to the Manor, where his cara sposa sojourneth. But these confounded parliamentary debates withstood my eagerness to comply. Your lordship may paint Madam Duty as a fair mistress, but she is, in truth, pitiless to her votaries."

"So, I presume, Bolton retires to vegetate on his lairdship in the Highlands?" inquired Lord Merindale.

"Not so; he clings to Blackstone and Co. still. He declares 'his education in jurisprudence by no means complete, and after that, the future must take care of itself.' Do you know, my lord, the fellow writes essays, and it is he who perpetrated the one that so struck your attention at Knowlton, entitled *Venality of Legislators*? A smart rap he gives us over the knuckles, faith!"

"You astonish me!" replied the earl. "We must get him into parliament."

"Oh, certainly," said the member, laughing; "let him be set up as a model of infallibility to a venal world. I wish him joy of the Woolsack, by premonition. Imagine Bolton in a big wig!"

"I tell you, Stanmore," pursued the earl, "a young man with such lofty principles and clear reasoning as that pamphlet develops, with the unswerving devotion to action and duty, I learn he evinces, may become Lord Chancellor, as you say. Why not?"

"Aye, my lord, provided he, by his essays, first reform the age to a level with his own high standard. It is not the spirit of the present one, to place power in the hands of a man who bestows his gifts of patronage through the mirror of worth and capacity. And singularly must Hugh Bolton be perverted, if even such an elevation could produce in him an oblivion to conscience or momentous responsibility."















